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Title *Mid Summer Nights Dream*

Author *Armour, A.S.*

Accession No. *1828*

Call No. *822.33*

*M62 A*

Borrower's  
No.

Issue  
Date

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*1925*

*20<sup>12</sup>/<sub>58</sub>*

FAMOUS PLAYS OF  
1931

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Conquistadores (Spanish)  
= Conquerors (English)

UNIFORM WITH THIS  
VOLUME

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FAMOUS PLAYS OF TO-DAY:

*JOURNEY'S END*  
*YOUNG WOODLEY*  
*MANY WATERS*  
*THE LADY WITH A LAMP*  
*SUCH MEN ARE DANGEROUS*  
*MRS. MOONLIGHT*

*38th thousand 7/6*

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SIX PLAYS:

*THE GREEN PASTURES*  
*STREET SCENE*  
*BADGER'S GREEN*  
*DOWN OUR STREET*  
*SOCRATES*  
*ALISON'S HOUSE*

*13th thousand 7/6*

Comp. Al.  
FAMOUS PLAYS OF  
1931

*THE BARRETT'S OF WIMPOLE  
STREET*

RUDOLPH BESIER

*THE IMPROPER DUCHESS*

JAMES B. FAGAN

*TO SEE OURSELVES*

E. M. DELAFIELD

*AFTER ALL*

JOHN VAN DRUTEN

*LONDON WALL*

JOHN VAN DRUTEN

*AUTUMN CROCUS*

C. L. ANTHONY

London

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*To return 10th of Oct 1937.*

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THE BARRETT'S  
OF WIMPOLE STREET

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MB2A

[illegible]



Rudolf Besier

THE BARRETT'S  
OF WIMPOLE STREET

*A Comedy in Five Acts*



“Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came . . .”  
—*King Lear*



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To  
HUGH WALPOLE

“ *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* ” was first produced at the Malvern Festival on August 20th, 1930, under the direction of Sir Barry Jackson. The cast of the play was as follows :

Doctor Chambers	AUBREY MALLALIEU
Elizabeth Barrett	
Moulton-Barrett	GWEN FFRANGCON- DAVIES
Wilson	EILEEN BELDON
Henrietta Moulton- Barrett	MARJORIE MARS
Arabel Moulton- Barrett	SUSAN RICHMOND
Octavius Moulton- Barrett	BARRY K. BARNES
Septimus Moulton- Barrett	B. B. COLEMAN
Alfred Moulton- Barrett	HUGH MOXEY
Charles Moulton- Barrett	LEONARD BENNETT
Henry Moulton- Barrett	DOUGLAS QUAYLE
George Moulton- Barrett	ANTHONY MARSHALL
Edward Moulton- Barrett	CEDRIC HARDWICKE
Bella Hedley	JOAN BARRY
Henry Bevan	OLIVER JOHNSTON
Robert Browning	SCOTT SUNDERLAND
Doctor Ford- Waterlow	WILFRID CAITHNESS
Captain Surtees	
Cook	HARRY WILCOXON
Flush	TUPPENNY OF WARE

# CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

EDWARD MOULTON-BARRETT

ALFRED MOULTON-BARRETT

GEORGE MOULTON-BARRETT

CHARLES MOULTON-BARRETT

HENRY MOULTON-BARRETT

SEPTIMUS MOULTON-BARRETT

OCTAVIUS MOULTON-BARRETT

ARABEL MOULTON-BARRETT

HENRIETTA MOULTON-BARRETT

ELIZABETH BARRETT MOULTON-  
BARRETT

ROBERT BROWNING

CAPTAIN W. SURTEES COOK

HENRY BEVAN

DOCTOR CHAMBERS

DOCTOR FORD-WATERLOW

BELLA HEDLEY

WILSON

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*This Comedy was played in Elizabeth Barrett's  
bed-sitting-room at 50, Wimpole Street, London,  
in 1845.*

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[illegible]



## ACT I

### PORTER IN A TANKARD

ELIZABETH BARRETT'S *bed-sitting-room* at 50, *Wimpole Street, London*. A window overlooking the street at the back. A door on the left. Fireplace on the right. It is best to give a description of the room in Elizabeth's own words from a letter to a friend :

" . . . The bed like a sofa and no bed : the large table placed out in the room, towards the wardrobe end of it ; the sofa rolled where a sofa should be rolled—opposite the armchair : the drawers crowned with a coronal of shelves (of paper, deal, and crimson merino) to carry my books ; the washing-table opposite turned into a cabinet with another coronal of shelves ; and Chaucer's and Homer's busts on guard over their two departments of English and Greek poetry ; three more busts consecrate the wardrobe. . . . In the window is fixed a deep box full of soil, where are springing up my scarlet-runners, nasturtiums, and convolvuluses, although they were disturbed a few days ago by the revolutionary insertion among them of a great ivy root with trailing branches so long and wide that the top tendrils are fastened to Henrietta's window of the higher storey, while the lower ones cover all my panes. . . . "

It is evening ; blinds and curtains are drawn ; the fire glows dully ; lamplight.

ELIZABETH lies on her sofa, her feet covered with a *couvre-pied*. Seated beside her is DOCTOR CHAMBERS, an elderly, white-whiskered man. He is feeling her pulse, watch in hand. FLUSH—Elizabeth's dog—lies asleep in his basket. On the table is a tray with the remains of a meal, and a pewter tankard.

CHAMBERS (*dropping her wrist and pocketing his watch*) : Hm—yes. It's this increasingly low vitality of yours that worries me. No life in you—none. . . . What are we going to do about it ?

ELIZABETH (*lightly*) : Well, Doctor, if you shut a person up in one room for years on end, you can't very well expect to find her bursting with life and vigour ! Why not prescribe something really exciting for a change ?

CHAMBERS : Exciting, eh ?

ELIZABETH : A gallop three times round the Park every morning—dumb-bell exercises—a course of callisthenics—a long sea-voyage . . .

CHAMBERS : How I wish I could, my dear !

ELIZABETH : It's funny to think of it now—but you know, Doctor, as a child I was a regular tom-boy !

CHAMBERS : Yes, I've heard all about that—and, mentally, you're a tom-boy still ! To tell you the truth, Miss Ba—oh forgive me, my dear Miss Elizabeth, that quaint nickname of yours slipped out unawares ! I'm always hearing it from your brothers and sisters. . . .

ELIZABETH (*smiling*) : Oh, please . . .

CHAMBERS : To tell you the truth, I'm not sure that brain of yours isn't altogether too active. The trouble with you is that you never will do anything in moderation—not even playing the invalid ! Seriously, aren't we, perhaps, overdoing our studies ?

ELIZABETH : Of course not.

CHAMBERS : Still hard at Greek ?

ELIZABETH : Oh, not more than two or three hours a day.

CHAMBERS : Hm. Are you engaged on any literary work at the moment ?

ELIZABETH : Only a few articles for the *Athenæum* and other papers.

CHAMBERS : The *Athenæum*—dear, dear ! . . . Now why not give all these heavy labours a rest, and turn your mind to something light and easy for a change ? . . . Poetry ! You're not neglecting your poetry, I hope ?

ELIZABETH : Meaning something—light and easy ! (*Laughs.*) Oh Doctor, I must remember to tell that to Mr. Robert Browning when I see him to-morrow !

CHAMBERS : Robert Browning ? A brother bard, eh ?

ELIZABETH : Don't tell me you've never heard of him !

CHAMBERS : Well, my dear, poetry isn't much in my line, you know.

ELIZABETH : That's evident ! All the same, read Mr. Browning's "Sordello"—and then come back and tell me that poetry's—light and easy !

CHAMBERS : I'll make a note of it. . . . Well, well, I suppose we mustn't rob you of your mental exercises if they keep you contented.

ELIZABETH : Contented ! Oh Doctor, I shudder to think what my life would be like if I hadn't a turn for scribbling and study !

CHAMBERS : Hm, yes. Quite so. Yes. . . . And this isn't the liveliest house for anyone to live in—let alone an invalid.

ELIZABETH : No, I suppose not. . . . I wish dear Papa were a happier man ! It would make such a world of difference to all of us. . . .

CHAMBERS : Happier, eh ? It's no business of mine, but when a man has good health, plenty of money, and a jolly family of boys and girls, I can't see why he should make life a burden to himself and others ! . . . It's amazing—incredible, and—well, as I said, it's no concern of mine. But you *are*, my dear—and a very worrying concern too ! Of course, the winter has been abominable, and these spring months are always trying. The fact is you oughtn't to live in England at all. Italy's the place for you.

ELIZABETH : Italy ! Oh Doctor, what a heavenly dream !



CHAMBERS : Yes—and must remain a dream, I fear. . . . But if only I could prescribe some sort of change for you—something—anything—to get you out of these dismal surroundings for a time. . . . Tell me now, Miss Elizabeth, have you ventured on your feet at all lately ?

ELIZABETH : No, hardly at all. I rather lost my nerve after that fall I had last Christmas.

CHAMBERS : I remember.

ELIZABETH : Papa, as you know, or one of my brothers, carries me from my bed to the sofa in the morning, and back to bed again at night. Sometimes, when I'm feeling venturesome, my maid supports me across the room.

CHAMBERS : Feeling venturesome at the moment?

ELIZABETH : Not particularly. . . .

CHAMBERS : All the same, I think we'll try a step or two. (*Rising, he takes both of her hands.*) Quietly now—slowly—there's no hurry. (*With his assistance she gets on to her feet.*) There we are.

[*She sways a little. He supports her.*

Feeling giddy, eh ?

ELIZABETH : A little. . . .

CHAMBERS : Close your eyes and lean against me. It will pass in a minute. . . . Better ?

ELIZABETH : Yes. . . . Oh, yes. . . .

CHAMBERS : Take your time now, and step carefully. Don't be nervous ; I won't let go your hands. . . . (*She takes a couple of faltering steps, he walking backwards holding her hands.*) No—don't look at the floor. Look straight ahead. . . . That's first rate—that's fine—splendid—splendid. . . .

[*After taking half a dozen steps she falters and sways.*

ELIZABETH : Oh Doctor ! . . . (*He quickly catches her in his arms and carries her back to the sofa.*)

CHAMBERS : Feeling faint ?

ELIZABETH : No, no, I'm all right. . . . I—I am really. . . . It's only my knees—they don't seem able to—to support me.

CHAMBERS : Well, if they can't do that, they're a pretty useless pair ! Why, there's no more to you than to a five-year-old ! . . . How's the appetite ? Just peck at your food, I suppose ?

ELIZABETH : I always try to eat what I'm given. But I'm never very hungry. (*With sudden animation*) Doctor, that reminds me ! Do you remember Papa suggesting to you that a kind of beer—called porter—might do me good ?

CHAMBERS : Yes—and an excellent suggestion too !

ELIZABETH : Oh, but forgive me, it was nothing of the kind ! I have to drink it twice a day out of a pewter tankard—and my life, in consequence, has become one long misery !

CHAMBERS : God bless my soul !

ELIZABETH : I am not exaggerating—one long misery . . . !

CHAMBERS : But, my dear child, quite apart from its invaluable blood-making properties, porter is generally considered a most palatable beverage. There's nothing I enjoy more than a pint of porter with my steak or chops at breakfast.

ELIZABETH (*in a shocked whisper*) : With your breakfast ! . . . All I can say is that to me porter is entirely horrible. . . . Horrible to look at, more horrible to smell, and most horrible to drink. Surely something one abominates so intensely can't possibly do one any good ! It's no use *my* appealing to Papa—especially as the dreadful idea originated with him. But if *you*, dear, dear Doctor Chambers, were to suggest to him that something else—anything—I don't mind what it is—might be equally efficacious . . .

CHAMBERS (*laughing*) : You poor little lady ! But of course I will !

ELIZABETH : Oh, thank you a thousand times !

CHAMBERS : What do you say to a couple of glasses of hot milk as a substitute ?

ELIZABETH : I dislike milk—but I'll drink it all day long, if only you'll rescue me from porter !

[*A knock at the door.*

Come in.

[WILSON, ELIZABETH'S maid, enters. *She is a fine, capable-looking girl in the middle twenties.*

Yes, Wilson ?

WILSON : Begging your pardon, Miss, but (*turning to the DOCTOR*) the Master wishes most particularly to see you before you leave, sir.

CHAMBERS : Of course, of course. . . . (*Looks at his watch*) And high time I were off ! Is your Master in his study ?

WILSON : Yes, sir.

CHAMBERS : Well, good-bye, Miss Elizabeth, good-bye. (*Takes her hand.*)

ELIZABETH : Good-bye, Doctor. (*In a low voice*) And you won't forget ?

CHAMBERS : Eh ?

ELIZABETH (*spelling the word*) : P-O-R-T-E-R.

CHAMBERS (*laughing*) : I'll speak to him about it now.

ELIZABETH : Oh, thank you ! thank you !

CHAMBERS (*still laughing*) : Good-night. (*To WILSON, as he goes to the door*) You needn't see me downstairs. I know my way.

WILSON : Thank you, sir.

[DOCTOR CHAMBERS goes out.

I'm just going to post your letters, Miss Ba. Shall I take Flush with me ?

ELIZABETH (*excitedly*) : Quick, Wilson—away with it ! (*Points at the tankard of porter.*)

WILSON (*bewildered*) : What, Miss ? . . .



ELIZABETH : I hadn't the courage to drink it at dinner. I was putting off the dreadful moment as long as I could. . . .

WILSON : Your porter, Miss ?

ELIZABETH : And now dear Doctor Chambers tells me I needn't drink it any longer. Take it away ! Quick ! Quick ! And never mention the word porter to me again !

WILSON : Lor', Miss ! Very good, Miss. But since you haven't had your porter, won't you—

ELIZABETH (*covering her ears*) : I told you never to mention the word again ! Take it away ! Please ! Please !

WILSON : Very good, Miss Ba. Come, Flush. (*She picks up the dog and puts him out of the room ; then returns for the tray, with a rather concerned glance at ELIZABETH, who starts laughing.*)

[HENRIETTA enters suddenly. She is a beautiful, high-spirited, blooming girl.

HENRIETTA : What are you laughing at, Ba ?

ELIZABETH : Wilson thinks I've gone mad.

WILSON : Mad, Miss ? What things you do say !

ELIZABETH (*still laughing*) : Will you, or won't you, take away that—that black beer ?

WILSON : Very good, Miss.

[WILSON goes out.

HENRIETTA : I don't know why you're laughing, Ba, and you needn't tell me. Only don't stop ! I'll tickle you if you think you can't keep it up without being helped ! . . . Oh, dinner was awful !

ELIZABETH : But, Henrietta—

HENRIETTA : Awful ! Awful ! *fearfully impressive*

ELIZABETH : Was Papa—

HENRIETTA : Yes, he was. It was awful. He was in one of his moods—the worst kind. The nagging mood is bad enough, the shouting mood is

*scolding  
habitual*

worse—but don't you think the *dumb* mood is the worst of all?

ELIZABETH : Yes, perhaps, but——

HENRIETTA : I don't believe there were more than a dozen remarks all through dinner—and most of them were frozen off at the tips ! Papa would just turn his glassy eyes on the speaker. . . . You know ? For the last twenty minutes or so the only sound in the room was the discreet clatter of knives and forks. Directly dinner was over he ordered his port to be taken to the study—and, thank Heaven ! he followed it almost at once.

ELIZABETH : Doctor Chambers is with him now.

HENRIETTA : Oh Ba, I do hope, for all our sakes, his report of you isn't *too* good.

ELIZABETH : But, Henrietta . . .

/ HENRIETTA (*all sudden contrition, kneeling at the sofa and putting her arms round ELIZABETH*) : Forgive me, dearest ! It was odious of me to say that ! You know I didn't mean it, don't you ? Nothing in the whole world matters to me if only you get better. You know that, don't you ?

ELIZABETH : Of course I do, you silly child. But what you said makes Papa an inhuman monster. And that's wickedly untrue. In his own way—he cares for all his children.

HENRIETTA : In his own way . . . ! No dear, what I meant was that good news of any kind would be certain to aggravate him in his present mood. I don't know why it should, but it does. (*With sudden anxiety*) Ba, Doctor Chambers isn't dissatisfied with you ? You're not worse ?

ELIZABETH : No, no, dear ; I am just the same—neither better nor worse. . . .

[ARABEL *enters*. *She is a tall, dark, serious woman.*

ARABEL : Oh, you're here, Henrietta ! I've

been looking for you everywhere. Papa has just sent you this note from his study.

HENRIETTA : Me ? Oh dear ! When he starts sending out notes from his study look out for squalls ! (*Opens the note and reads*) “ *I have heard this morning that your Aunt and Uncle Hedley, and your Cousin Bella, have arrived in London earlier than was expected. They are staying at Fenton’s Hotel. Your cousin Bella and her fiancé, Mr. Bevan, propose to call on you to-morrow at 3 o’clock. You and Arabel will, of course, be here to receive them, and if Elizabeth is well enough, you will bring them upstairs to see her. I have written to invite your Uncle and Aunt and Cousin to dinner next Thursday.—Papa.*” Well !

ARABEL : I understand now why Papa seemed so—so displeased at dinner.

HENRIETTA : Vile-tempered you mean.

ARABEL : Is it necessary always to use the ugliest word ?

HENRIETTA : Yes, Arabel—when you’re describing the ugliest thing. Oh, but Papa is quite impossible ! He got that letter from the Hedleys at breakfast. Why couldn’t he have spoken then ? Why couldn’t he have spoken at dinner ? Heaven knows he had opportunity enough !

ARABEL : I’m afraid he was too displeased.

HENRIETTA (*with a grimace*) : Displeased. . . . Oh, of course, we all know that he hates being ordinarily polite to anyone—and now he’s simply bound to show some kind of hospitality to the Hedleys ! No wonder he was—*displeased*.

ELIZABETH : Are you quite fair, dear ? Papa seldom objects to us receiving our friends here.

HENRIETTA : For a cup of tea and a bun—and so long as the house is clear of them before he’s back from the City ! Has *anyone* of us *ever* been allowed to ask *anyone* to dinner ? or even to luncheon ? But that’s an old story ! What enrages me is that I was expecting a friend to-morrow at



three—and now I shall have to put him off somehow. >

ARABEL (*archly*) : Why ?

HENRIETTA : Why what ?

ARABEL (*as before*) : Why must you put your friend off ? Bella and her *fiancé* won't eat—your friend.

HENRIETTA (*angrily*) : What—what business is that of yours ?

ARABEL (*dismayed*) : But, Henrietta—

HENRIETTA : I hate people prying into my affairs ! . . .

[*She goes quickly out of the room, slamming the door behind her.*]

ARABEL (*distressed*) : Oh dear ! Oh dear ! What can be the matter with her to-night ? Usually she quite enjoys being quizzed about Captain Surtees Cook.

ELIZABETH : Perhaps she may have begun to take his attentions seriously.

ARABEL : Oh Ba, I hope not ! You remember when young Mr. Palfrey wanted to marry her two years ago—those dreadful scenes with Papa ?

ELIZABETH : I should rather forget them.

ARABEL : Oh, why can't Henrietta realise that if there's one thing Papa will never, *never* permit, it's a marriage in the family ? It doesn't worry *me* at all, as gentlemen never attracted me in that way. Nor you, dear . . .

ELIZABETH (*with a laugh*) : Me !

ARABEL : Of course, my poor darling, to-day anything of that kind is quite out of the question—Papa or no Papa. But even when you were younger and stronger, I don't ever remember your having had . . . little affairs with gentlemen.

ELIZABETH (*whimsically*) : Perhaps the gentlemen never gave me the chance.

ARABEL : Oh, but you were quite pretty as a young girl.

ELIZABETH : What is Captain Surtees Cook like ? Is he nice ?

ARABEL : Yes, I think so. Yes, quite nice. But he never says much. He just sits and looks at Henrietta.

ELIZABETH : She's very lovely. . . .

ARABEL : But Papa would never countenance any kind of understanding between them. Captain Cook would be forbidden the house at the least mention of such a thing—and it's dreadful to think what would happen to Henrietta ! Even if he came offering her a coronet, instead of being an officer with a small allowance in addition to his pay, it would make no difference. You know that as well as I do.

ELIZABETH : Poor Henrietta. . . .

[HENRIETTA *re-enters*. She goes quickly up to ARABEL and kisses her.

HENRIETTA : I'm sorry.

ARABEL : Oh, my dear, I never meant to annoy you.

HENRIETTA : You didn't—you *displeased* me !  
(*With a laugh*) Oh, I'm Papa's daughter all right !

ELIZABETH : When Bella and her *fiancé* call to-morrow, Arabel will bring them up here to see me—and you can entertain Captain Cook in the drawing-room.

[ARABEL *looks distressed*.

HENRIETTA : What a thing it is to be a genius ! You darling ! (*Embraces ELIZABETH.*)

ELIZABETH : But I must have the room to myself at half-past three, as Mr. Robert Browning is calling then.

HENRIETTA (*excitedly*) : No !

ARABEL : But I thought——

HENRIETTA : Of course, I know you've been corresponding with Mr. Browning for months as I've posted any number of your letters to him. But then you write to so many literary people whom you absolutely refuse to see, and——

ARABEL : Has Papa given his permission ?

ELIZABETH : Of course.

HENRIETTA : But why—why have you made an exception of Mr. Browning ? I've heard he's wonderfully handsome, but——

ELIZABETH (*laughing*) : Oh, Henrietta, you're incorrigible !

ARABEL : I know he's been most anxious to call. Mr. Kenyon told me so.

HENRIETTA : But you said yourself, only a short time ago, that you didn't intend to receive him !

ELIZABETH : I didn't—and I don't particularly want to now.

HENRIETTA : But why ?

ELIZABETH (*lightly*) : Because, my dear, at heart I'm as vain as a peacock ! . . . You see, when people admire my work they are quite likely to picture the poetess as stately and beautiful as her verses. At least, that's what I always tell myself. . . . And it's dreadfully humiliating to disillusion them !

HENRIETTA : Don't be silly, Ba. You're very interesting and picturesque.

ELIZABETH (*laughing*) : Isn't that how guide-books usually describe a ruin ?

HENRIETTA : Oh Ba, I didn't mean——

ELIZABETH : Of course not, dear ! . . . As a matter of fact, Mr. Browning has been so insistent that, out of sheer weariness, I've given way. But I don't want an audience to witness the tragedy of his disillusionment ! So mind, Arabel—Bella and her Mr. Bevan must have left the room before he arrives.

[*A knock at the door.*]

Come in.

[OCTAVIUS BARRETT *enters. He is about eighteen, and he stammers slightly.*]

Come in, Occy.

OCTAVIUS : I've j-just come to see how you are, and to wish you g-good-night. (*Bends down and kisses her.*) Doctor satisfied ?

ELIZABETH : Oh yes, I think so.

HENRIETTA (*handing OCTAVIUS Barrett's note*) : Read that, Octavius.

ARABEL (*while OCTAVIUS reads*) : Oh dear ! I quite forgot that I was to attend a lecture on the Chinese Wesleyan Mission at Exeter Hall to-morrow afternoon !

OCTAVIUS : Well, you can't attend it. (*Flourishes Barrett's letter.*) This is undoubtedly a Royal D-decree !

HENRIETTA (*dramatically*) : Given at Our study at 50, Wimpole Street, on this 19th day of May, 1845. God save Papa !

ARABEL (*reprovingly*) : Henrietta dear !

[*A knock at the door.*]

ELIZABETH : Come in.

[SEPTIMUS BARRETT *enters. He is a year older than OCTAVIUS. Like OCTAVIUS and the other Barrett brothers who subsequently appear, he is in evening dress.*]

Well, Septimus ?

SEPTIMUS : How are you, Ba ? (*Kisses her.*) I hope the Doctor is satisfied with you ?

ELIZABETH : Oh yes, I think so.

OCTAVIUS : I say, Septimus, the Hedleys are d-dining here in force next Thursday.

SEPTIMUS : Bai Jove ! Not really ?

[*A knock at the door.*]

ELIZABETH : Come in.



[ALFRED BARRETT enters. He is older than SEPTIMUS.

Come in, Alfred.

ALFRED : And how's our dear Ba to-night ? I hope the Doctor was happy about you ?

ELIZABETH : Oh yes, I think so.

[A knock at the door.

Come in.

[CHARLES BARRETT enters. He is somewhat older than ALFRED.

Come in, Charles.

CHARLES : How are you feeling to-night, Ba ? (*Kisses her.*) I hope Doctor Chambers' report was good ?

ELIZABETH : Oh yes, I think so.

[A knock at the door.

Come in.

[HENRY BARRETT enters. He is slightly older than CHARLES.

Come in, Henry.

HENRY : Well, Ba ? How are you, my dear ? (*Kisses her.*) Was the Doctor pleased with his patient ?

ELIZABETH : Oh yes, I think so.

HENRY : That's good. I must say I think you are looking a little better. What d'you say, Charles ?

CHARLES : Eh ?

HENRY : Looking better, don't you know. More herself, what ?

[A knock at the door.

ELIZABETH : Come in.

[GEORGE BARRETT enters. He is slightly older than HENRY.

Come in, George.

GEORGE : Well, and how's Ba to-night ? (*Kisses*



her.) The Doctor's just been, hasn't he? I'm afraid he wasn't too pleased with you.

ELIZABETH : Oh yes, I think so. . . . I mean—why?

GEORGE : You're not looking so well. Is she, Henry?

HENRY : On the contrary, I think she's looking considerably better. So does Charles. Don't you, Charles?

CHARLES : Eh?

OCTAVIUS : I say, George, the Hedleys have arrived unexpectedly in town. Bella and her swain are c-calling on the girls to-morrow afternoon. And on Thursday she and her parents are d-dining here in state.

ALFRED, HENRY, SEPTIMUS (*simultaneously*) : Dining *here* !

GEORGE : Well, I hope they'll enjoy their dinner as much as we did to-night !

HENRY : You have met this Mr. Bevan, haven't you?

GEORGE : I have.

HENRY : What is he like?

GEORGE : Pompous ass. But warm—a very warm man. Ten thousand pounds a year, if he has a penny.

HENRIETTA : No !

GEORGE : And ten thousand more when his grandmother dies.

ARABEL : Oh !

HENRIETTA : It's grossly unfair ! What has Bella done to deserve such luck ?

OCTAVIUS : George says he's a p-pompous ass.

HENRIETTA : Oh, that's jealousy ! No man with ten thousand a year can be (*imitating his stammer*) a—p-p-p-p-pompous ass !

GEORGE : I think it's just possible that you'll all

be interested to hear that Papa is going to Plymouth on business next week, and——

[*Excited exclamations from all except ELIZABETH.*  
HENRIETTA : Go on, George, go on ! *And—— ?*  
GEORGE : And that he's not expected to return—for at least a fortnight.

[*Murmurs of satisfaction and smiling faces.*

HENRIETTA : Oh, George ! (*She flings her arms round his neck.*) How wonderful ! How glorious ! Do you polk, George ?

GEORGE : Don't be childish.

HENRIETTA : Well, I polk !

[*She dances the polka round the room, humming a polka measure. The others look on amused. OCTAVIUS claps his hands. The door is opened quietly and EDWARD MOULTON-BARRETT enters. He is a well-set-up handsome man of sixty.*

ELIZABETH : Papa . . .

[*An uneasy silence falls. HENRIETTA, in the middle of the room, stops dead. BARRETT stands for a moment just beyond the threshold looking before him with a perfectly expressionless face.*

Good evening, Papa. . . .

[*Without replying, BARRETT crosses the room and takes his stand with his back to the fireplace. A pause. No one moves.*

BARRETT (*in a cold, measured voice*) : I am most displeased. (*A pause.*) It is quite in order that you should visit your sister of an evening and have a few quiet words with her. But I think I have pointed out, not once, but several times, that, in her very precarious state of health, it is inadvisable for more than three of you to be in her room at the same time. My wishes in this matter have been disregarded—as usual. (*A pause.*) You all know very well that your sister must avoid any kind of excitement. Absolute quiet is essential, especially before she retires

for the night. And yet I find you romping around her like a lot of disorderly children. . . . I am gravely displeased.

[HENRIETTA *gives a nervous little giggle.*

I am not aware that I have said anything amusing, Henrietta?

HENRIETTA : I—I beg your pardon, Papa.

BARRETT : And may I ask what you were doing as I came into the room?

HENRIETTA : I was showing Ba how to polk.

BARRETT : To . . . polk?

HENRIETTA : How to dance the polka.

BARRETT : I see.

[*A pause.*

OCTAVIUS (*nervously*) : Well, B-Ba, I think I'll say g-good-night, and——

BARRETT : I should be grateful if you would kindly allow me to finish speaking.

OCTAVIUS : Sorry, sir. I—I thought you'd d-done.

BARRETT (*with frigid anger*) : Are you being insolent, sir?

OCTAVIUS : N-no indeed, sir—I assure you, I——

BARRETT : Very well. Now——

ELIZABETH (*quickly, nervously*) : As I am really the cause of your displeasure, Papa, I ought to tell you that I like nothing better than a—a little noise occasionally. (*A slight pause.*) It—it's delightful having all the family here together—and can't possibly do me any harm. . . .

BARRETT : Perhaps you will forgive my saying, Elizabeth, that you are not the best judge of what is good or bad for you. . . . And that brings me to what I came here to speak to you about. Doctor Chambers told me just now that you had persuaded him to allow you to discontinue drinking porter with your meals.

ELIZABETH : It needed very little persuasion, Papa. I said I detested porter, and he agreed at once that I should take milk instead.

BARRETT : I questioned him closely as to the comparative strength-giving values of porter and milk, and he was forced to admit that porter came decidedly first.

ELIZABETH : That may be, Papa. But when you dislike a thing to loathing, I don't see how it can do you any good.

BARRETT : I said just now that you are not the best judge of what is good or bad for you, my child. May I add that self-discipline is always beneficial, and self-indulgence invariably harmful ?

ELIZABETH : If you think my drinking milk shows reckless self-indulgence, Papa, you're quite wrong. I dislike it only less than porter.

BARRETT : Your likes and dislikes are quite beside the point in a case like this.

ELIZABETH : But Papa——

BARRETT : Believe me, Elizabeth, I have nothing but your welfare at heart when I warn you that if you decide to discontinue drinking porter, you will incur my grave displeasure.

ELIZABETH (*indignantly*) : But—but when Doctor Chambers himself——

BARRETT : I have told you what Doctor Chambers said.

ELIZABETH : Yes, but——

BARRETT : Did you drink your porter at dinner ?

ELIZABETH : No.

BARRETT : Then I hope you will do so before you go to bed.

ELIZABETH : No, Papa, that's really asking too much ! I—I can't drink the horrible stuff in cold blood.



BARRETT : Very well. Of course, I have no means of coercing you. You are no longer a child. But I intend to give your better nature every chance of asserting itself. A tankard of porter will be left at your bedside. And I hope that to-morrow you will be able to tell me that—you have obeyed your Father.

ELIZABETH : I am sorry, Papa—but I shan't drink it.

BARRETT (*to HENRIETTA*) : Go down to the kitchen and fetch a tankard of porter.

HENRIETTA : No.

BARRETT : I beg your pardon ?

HENRIETTA (*her voice trembling with anger and agitation*) : It's—it's sheer cruelty. You know how Ba hates the stuff. The Doctor has let her off. You're just torturing her because you—you like torturing.

BARRETT : I have told you to fetch a tankard of porter from the kitchen.

HENRIETTA : I won't do it.

BARRETT : Must I ask you a third time ? (*Suddenly shouting*) Obey me this instant !

ELIZABETH (*sharply*) : Papa . . . Go and fetch it, Henrietta ! Go at once ! I can't stand this. . . .

HENRIETTA : No, I—

ELIZABETH : Please—please . . .

[*After a moment's indecision, HENRIETTA turns and goes out.*]

BARRETT (*quietly, after a pause*) : You had all better say good-night to your sister.

ARABEL (*in a whisper*) : Good-night, dearest. (*She kisses ELIZABETH on the cheek.*)

ELIZABETH (*receiving the kiss impassively*) : Good-night.

[ARABEL leaves the room. Then each of the brothers in turn goes to ELIZABETH and kisses her cheek.

GEORGE : Good-night, Ba.

ELIZABETH : Good-night.

[GEORGE goes out.

ALFRED : Good-night, Ba.

ELIZABETH : Good-night.

[ALFRED goes out.

HENRY : Good-night, Ba.

ELIZABETH : Good-night.

[HENRY goes out.

CHARLES : Good-night, Ba.

ELIZABETH : Good-night.

[CHARLES goes out.

SEPTIMUS : Good-night, Ba.

ELIZABETH : Good-night.

[SEPTIMUS goes out.

OCTAVIUS : G-good-night, Ba.

ELIZABETH : Good-night.

[OCTAVIUS goes out.

BARRETT, standing before the fireplace, and ELIZABETH on her sofa, look before them with expressionless faces. A pause. HENRIETTA enters with a tankard on a small tray. She stands a little beyond the threshold glaring at her father and breathing quickly.

ELIZABETH : Give it to me, please.

[HENRIETTA goes to her. ELIZABETH takes the tankard, and is putting it to her lips, when BARRETT suddenly, but quietly, intervenes.

BARRETT : No. (Putting HENRIETTA aside, he takes the tankard from ELIZABETH. To HENRIETTA) You may go.

HENRIETTA : Good-night, Ba darling. (She moves forward to ELIZABETH, but BARRETT waves her back.)

BARRETT : You may go.

ELIZABETH : Good-night.

[HENRIETTA, *with a defiant look at her father, goes out.*

BARRETT *puts the tankard on the mantelpiece ; then goes to the sofa and stands looking down at ELIZABETH. She stares up at him with wide, fearful eyes.*

BARRETT (*in a gentle voice*) : Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH (*in a whisper*) : Yes?

BARRETT (*placing his hand on her head and bending it slightly back*) : Why do you look at me like that, child ? . . . Are you frightened ?

ELIZABETH (*as before*) : No.

BARRETT : You're trembling. . . . Why ?

ELIZABETH : I—I don't know.

BARRETT : You're not frightened of me ?  
(*ELIZABETH is about to speak—he goes on quickly*)  
No, no. You mustn't say it. I couldn't bear to think that. (*He seats himself on the side of the sofa and takes her hands.*) You're everything in the world to me—you know that. Without you I should be quite alone—you know that too. And you—if you love me, you can't be afraid of me. For love casts out fear. . . . You love me, my darling ? You love your father ?

ELIZABETH (*in a whisper*) : Yes.

BARRETT (*eagerly*) : And you'll prove your love by doing as I wish ?

ELIZABETH : I don't understand. I was going to drink——

BARRETT (*quickly*) : Yes—out of fear, not love. Listen, dear. I told you just now that if you disobeyed me you would incur my displeasure. I take that back. I shall never, in any way, reproach you. You shall never know by deed or word, or hint, of mine how much you have



grieved and wounded your father by refusing to do the little thing he asked. . . .

ELIZABETH : Oh please, please, don't say any more. It's all so petty and sordid. Please give me the tankard.

BARRETT (*rising*) : You are acting of your own free will, and not—

ELIZABETH : Oh, Papa, let us get this over and forget it ! I can't forgive myself for having made the whole house miserable over a tankard of porter. (*He gives her the tankard.*)

[*She drinks the porter straight off. BARRETT places the tankard back on the mantelpiece ; then returns to the sofa and looks yearningly down at ELIZABETH.*

BARRETT : You're not feeling worse to-night, my darling ?

ELIZABETH (*listlessly*) : No, Papa.

BARRETT : Just tired ?

ELIZABETH : Yes . . . just tired.

BARRETT : I'd better leave you now. . . . Shall I say a little prayer with you before I go ?

ELIZABETH : Please, Papa.

[*BARRETT kneels down beside the sofa, clasps his hands, lifts his face, and shuts his eyes. ELIZABETH clasps her hands, but keeps her eyes wide open.*

BARRETT : Almighty and merciful God, hear me, I beseech Thee, and grant my humble prayer. In Thine inscrutable wisdom Thou hast seen good to lay on Thy daughter Elizabeth grievous and heavy afflictions. For years she hath languished in sickness ; and for years, unless in Thy mercy Thou take her to Thyself, she may languish on. Give her to realise the blessed word that Thou chastisest those whom Thou lovest. Give her to bear her sufferings in patience. Give her to fix her heart and soul on Thee and on that Heavenly Eternity which may at any moment open out before her. Take her into Thy loving care to-night ; purge her

mind of all bitter and selfish and unkind thoughts ; guard her and comfort her. These things I beseech Thee for the sake of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

ELIZABETH : Amen.

BARRETT (*rising to his feet, and kissing her forehead*) : Good-night, my child.

ELIZABETH (*receiving his kiss impassively*) : Good-night, Papa.

[BARRETT goes out.

ELIZABETH *lies motionless staring before her for a moment or two. A knock at the door.*

Come in.

[WILSON enters carrying FLUSH.

WILSON (*putting FLUSH in his basket*) : Are you ready for your bed now, Miss Ba ?

ELIZABETH : Oh, Wilson, I'm so tired—tired—tired of it all. . . . Will it never end ?

WILSON : End, Miss ?

ELIZABETH : This long, long, grey death in life.

WILSON : Oh, Miss Ba, you shouldn't say such things !

ELIZABETH : No, I suppose I shouldn't. . . . Did Flush enjoy his run ?

WILSON : Oh yes, Miss. (*A short pause.*)

ELIZABETH : Is it a fine night, Wilson ?

WILSON : Yes, Miss, and quite warm, and there's such a lovely moon.

ELIZABETH (*eagerly*) : A moon ! Oh, do you think I can see it from here ?

WILSON : I don't know, I'm sure.

ELIZABETH : Draw back the curtains and raise the blind.

[WILSON does so ; and moonlight, tempered by the lamplight, streams on ELIZABETH's face.

WILSON : There you are, Miss ! The moon's right above the chimneys. You can see it lovely !

ELIZABETH (*dreamily*) : Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Please put out the lamp and leave me for a little. I don't want to go to bed quite yet.

WILSON : Very well, Miss Ba.

[WILSON *extinguishes the lamp and goes out.*

ELIZABETH *is bathed in strong moonlight. She stares, for a while, with wide eyes at the moon. Then her quickened breathing becomes audible, and her whole body is shaken with sobs. She turns over on her side and buries her face in her arms. The only sound is her strangled weeping as the Scene closes.*

## ACT II

MR. ROBERT BROWNING

*The afternoon of the following day. The curtains are drawn aside, the blinds are up, and sunshine pours into the room. On a little table near ELIZABETH'S sofa is a tray, with an untouched sweet on it.*

[ELIZABETH lies on the sofa, her couvre-pied over her feet. She is reading a small book with intense absorption; now and again running her fingers through her ringlets, or tossing them back from her face. FLUSH lies in his basket.]

ELIZABETH (*with puzzled emphasis*) :

“ *With flowers in completeness,  
All petals, no prickles,  
Delicious as trickles  
Of wine poured at mass-time.* ”

[A knock at the door. ELIZABETH, absorbed, takes no notice. She repeats, clutching her forehead :

“ *All petals, no prickles,  
Delicious as trickles——* ”

[The knock repeated.]

“ *Of wine——* ”

Come in. . . .

[WILSON enters.]

Oh yes, Wilson . . . I'm quite ready for lunch.

WILSON (*stolidly*) : You've had your lunch, Miss Ba.

ELIZABETH : Oh yes, of course. . . . And I enjoyed it very much !

WILSON : You only picked at the fish, Miss Ba. An' I took away the best part of that nice chop. An' I see you haven't touched the pudding—cornflour blammonge, too, with raspberry jam.



ELIZABETH (*wonderingly regarding the tray*) : Oh. . . . Anyhow, it's too late now. . . . (*She once more plunges into her book.*)

[WILSON carries out the tray and re-enters immediately, shutting the door after her.]

WILSON (*going to the mantelpiece and measuring out some medicine into a medicine glass*) : And now, Miss Ba, if you're all nice and comfortable, I'll take Flush out for his airing.

[ELIZABETH, absorbed in her reading, takes no notice. WILSON holds the glass of medicine towards her.]

Your physic, Miss Ba.

ELIZABETH (*taking the glass, with her eyes still fixed on her book*) : Thank you. (*With the glass in her hand she continues reading.*)

WILSON (*going to the window*) : I think, p'raps, I'd better pull down the blind a bit. Too much sun isn't good for you, Miss. . . . (*She half draws down the blind.*)

ELIZABETH (*holding out the untouched glass, her eyes still on the book*) : Thank you. . . .

WILSON : You haven't drunk it yet, Miss.

ELIZABETH : Oh. . . . (*She swallows the medicine and, with a little grimace, hands the glass back to WILSON.*) Please open the door, Wilson. I am expecting visitors this afternoon, and I want the room to be quite fresh for them. How I wish we could open the window !

WILSON (*shocked*) : Open the window, Miss Ba !

ELIZABETH (*with a sigh*) : Yes, I know it's strictly forbidden. . . . Well, open the door wide.

WILSON : I'd best cover you well up first of all. (*Fetches a rug.*) Visitors, Miss Ba ? . . .

ELIZABETH (*while WILSON covers her up to her chin*) : Yes, my cousin, Miss Bella Hedley. I haven't

seen her since she was a child—such a lovely slip of a child ! And now she's just become engaged.

WILSON : Indeed, Miss. And is she bringing her young gentleman with her ?

ELIZABETH : Yes.

[WILSON *opens the door*.

And Mr. Robert Browning is calling later.

WILSON : Indeed, Miss ? The gentleman who's always sending you such lovely boukeys ?

ELIZABETH : Yes. (*Starts reading again.*)

WILSON : Sure you don't feel a draught, Miss Ba ?

ELIZABETH (*without looking up*) : Quite, thanks.

WILSON : Hadn't you better keep your arms covered ? These spring days the air is that treacherous.

ELIZABETH (*to herself, with despairing emphasis*) : No—it's quite beyond me ! I give it up !

WILSON : Beg pardon ?

ELIZABETH (*speaking intensely*) : Wilson.

WILSON : Yes, Miss.

ELIZABETH (*as before*) : Have you noticed anything—*strange* in me to-day ?

WILSON : Strange, Miss ?

ELIZABETH : Yes, strange. I mean—dull-witted—thick-headed—stupid—idiotic. . . .

WILSON : Lor' ! No ! P'raps a bit absent-minded like—but that isn't anything for you to worry about, Miss Ba.

ELIZABETH : Then you don't think I'm going—*mad* ?

WILSON : Mercy on us ! Mad !

ELIZABETH : Very well. But now, listen carefully and tell me what you make of this :— (*She reads*)

“ *And after, for pastime,  
If June be refulgent*

*With flowers in completeness,  
All petals, no prickles,  
Delicious as trickles  
Of wine poured at mass-time,—  
And choose one indulgent  
To redness and sweetness :*

*Or if, with experience of man and of spider,  
June used my June-lightning, the strong insect-ridder,  
To stop the fresh film work,—why June will consider.”*

Well ?

WILSON (*enthusiastically*) : I call that just lovely,  
Miss Ba !

ELIZABETH : But do you know what it means ?

WILSON : Oh no, Miss.

ELIZABETH : Does it convey *anything* at *all* to your  
mind ?

WILSON : Oh no, Miss.

ELIZABETH (*with a sigh of relief*) : Thank Heaven  
for that !

WILSON : But then po'try never does, Miss.  
Leastways, not real po'try, like what you make.

ELIZABETH (*laughing*) : But *I* didn't write that !  
It's by Mr. Browning.

WILSON : He must be a clever gentleman !

ELIZABETH : Oh yes ! He's all that !

[WILSON *has picked up* FLUSH.

Well, Flush dear, are you going to behave nicely  
to-day ? (*She holds out her arms for the dog and*  
WILSON *gives it to her.*) I shall ask Wilson for a full  
report when she gets home. (*To WILSON*) Where  
are you taking him to ?

WILSON : Well, Miss, being so fine, I thought of a  
little walk in the Park.

ELIZABETH : Oh yes. And mind you notice the  
flowers ! I shall want to hear all about them.  
The laburnum is over of course. But there ought  
to be still some pink May, and tulips, and wall-  
flowers. And perhaps some early roses. . . . Oh



Flush, I'd give almost anything to be going with you instead of Wilson !

OCTAVIUS (*outside*) : May I c-come in ?

ELIZABETH : Occy, dear !

[OCTAVIUS *enters*. ELIZABETH *gives* FLUSH to WILSON.

What on earth are you doing at home at this time of the day ?

[WILSON *goes out, carrying* FLUSH.

OCTAVIUS : Papa's b-bright idea. Suggested I should take a half-holiday to help you feed and entertain the l-love-birds. x

ELIZABETH (*laughing*) : But why ? Henrietta and Arabel are socially quite competent. So am I.

OCTAVIUS : But you labour under the d-dis-advantage of being all the same sex. Papa appears to think that at least one male B-Barrett ought to show up. He seems fully determined to do the p-polite thing by the Hedleys. And when Papa is fully d-determined on a thing, that thing is done. Or am I wrong ?

ELIZABETH (*sighing*) : No—that thing is done. . . . But now—I want you to be diplomatic. Captain Surtees Cook is calling at the same time as Bella and Mr. Bevan. He's coming to see Henrietta. . . .

OCTAVIUS : Is he, by Jove ! And won't the gallant fella rejoice when he finds Henrietta chaperoned f-four times over !

ELIZABETH : I've arranged for Arabel to bring Bella and Mr. Bevan up here to see me. *You* must come with them.

OCTAVIUS : Must I indeed ? And why ?

ELIZABETH : So that Henrietta may have Captain Cook to herself for a little while.

OCTAVIUS : Oh. Ah. Yes. Quite so. I see. . . . And you d-don't look in the least ashamed of yourself !

ELIZABETH : I'm not.

OCTAVIUS : But does it occur to you, my dear Ba, that we may be doing Henrietta an uncommonly b-bad turn by encouraging this b-budding romance ?

ELIZABETH : Yes. But I think we ought to chance that. . . .

*[He looks at her questioningly.]*

Occy, when you six boys wished me good-night yesterday, a queer thought came into my mind. You weren't alive at all—just automata.

OCTAVIUS : By Jove !

ELIZABETH : Like automata, you get up at half past seven every morning. Like automata, you eat your breakfasts. Like automata, you go to your work. Like automata, you return home. You dine like automata. You go to bed like automata.

OCTAVIUS : But I say——

ELIZABETH : And though she works on different lines, Arabel is just as automatic. You all seem to me to have cut out of life everything that makes life worth living—excitement, adventure, change, conflict, frivolity, love. . . .

OCTAVIUS : *We* haven't cut 'em out, my dear ! That operation was performed by dear P-Papa.

ELIZABETH : I know, but——

OCTAVIUS : Oh, I admit we're a pretty spineless lot ! But what would you ? We're none of us particularly g-gifted—and we're all of us wholly dependent on Papa, and must obey, or be broken. You're not c-counselling sedition ?

ELIZABETH : No—but not resignation. Keep your souls alive. What frightens me is that you may become content with a life which isn't life at all. You're going that way—all of you—except Henrietta.

OCTAVIUS : And what does she get by t-trying to be herself ? More kicks than ha'pence !

ELIZABETH : Yes—but being kicked keeps one alive ! So don't let us do anything, just for the sake of peace and quiet, to hinder her little romance. Even if it should come to grief.

OCTAVIUS : It will.

ELIZABETH : Grief is better than stagnation.

OCTAVIUS : All very f-fine, my dear Ba—but what about you ?

ELIZABETH : Me ?

OCTAVIUS : Yes, you. We may all, with the possible exception of young Henrietta, be drifting with the stream. But I don't notice that you make much of a struggle against it. Where did that p-porter finally g-get to last night ?

ELIZABETH (*with a dreary little laugh*) : Oh, but I don't count ! I am quite out of it. You have your lives before you. My life is over.

OCTAVIUS : Rubbish !

[HENRIETTA *enters*.

HENRIETTA : Why, Occy, what are you doing here ?

OCTAVIUS : Papa's n-notion. He somehow got wind that Surtees Cook was p-prowling around this afternoon and sent me home to head the f-feller off.

ELIZABETH : Occy !

HENRIETTA (*in breathless consternation*) : How did he hear ? He couldn't have heard—(to ELIZABETH) unless you, or Arabel—

ELIZABETH : Occy, you idiot ! No, dear—

OCTAVIUS : Sorry ! My little joke, you know. . . .

HENRIETTA (*hotly*) : I hate you !

OCTAVIUS : Quite right too. (*Puts his arm around her.*) I repeat, I'm sorry. You may s-slap me if you like.

HENRIETTA (*half mollified*) : I've a good mind to.  
OCTAVIUS (*sitting down and drawing her on to his knee*) : No, my che-ild, it's like this. His Majesty sent me home to represent His Majesty at the reception. I don't intend to leave Bella's side—not even when she and her beloved come up here to emb-brace Ba. Meanwhile you'll amuse Cook—j-just as you're amusing me now. (*Kisses her.*) In fact, we may take this as a l-little rehearsal.

HENRIETTA (*jumping up from his knee*) : Occy ! how can you be so vulgar ! (*She listens.*) What's that ? (*Runs to the window.*) Oh Ba, they've arrived ! And in state ! The Bevan family barouche, powdered footman and all !

[OCTAVIUS joins her at the window.

Look at Bella ! What a gown ! What a bonnet ! Lovely ! Oh, and Mr. Bevan's whiskers ! (*Gestures round her chin.*) Aren't you green with envy, Occy ?

OCTAVIUS : Positively verdant.

HENRIETTA (*pushing OCTAVIUS to the door*) : Go and help Arabel receive them. Off with you ! Quick ! I'll wait here till Captain Cook arrives. I'm going to let him in. And then you and Arabel can bring Bella and Mr. Bevan up here.

OCTAVIUS : All c-cut and dried, what ? But l-look here——

HENRIETTA : Go along with you ! (*Pushes him out of the room and shuts the door. Then runs again to the window and looks eagerly down into the street.*) What's the time ?

ELIZABETH (*smiling*) : Five minutes past three.

HENRIETTA : *Past* three ?

ELIZABETH : Past three.

HENRIETTA : I don't understand. . . . He said *three*. . . . (*With sudden anxiety*) Ba ! To-day is Thursday, isn't it ?



ELIZABETH : Yes, dear.

HENRIETTA (*with a sigh of relief*) : Oh . . . (*Turns again to the window*) I wish he were able to come in his uniform. That would take the curl out of Mr. Bevan's whiskers !

[ELIZABETH *laughs*.

Oh, there he comes !

[*She runs out of the room leaving the door open.*

ELIZABETH : Please shut the door. (*But HENRIETTA has gone. ELIZABETH smilingly shrugs her shoulders, picks up her book and starts reading. After a moment one hears voices outside ; then approaching footsteps. OCTAVIUS re-enters.*)

OCTAVIUS : Are you ready to receive them ?

ELIZABETH : Yes, quite. What are they like, Occy ?

OCTAVIUS : Oh, *she's* a dream of l-loveliness ! And *he*—isn't. . . .

[*He goes out. A pause. The voices grow nearer. Then BELLA HEDLEY flutters in. She is an exquisitely pretty, exquisitely turned-out little creature, voluble, affected, sentimental, with a constitutional inability to pronounce her r's. She is followed by ARABEL, MR. HENRY BEVAN, and OCTAVIUS. MR. BEVAN is a model of deportment, inwardly and outwardly. He affects a magnificent Kruger beard, and his voice and manner are as beautifully rounded as his legs.*

BELLA (*ecstatically*) : Cousin Elizabeth !

ELIZABETH (*stretching out her hand*) : Bella, dear. . . .

BELLA : Ba ! (*Drops on her knees at the sofa and embraces ELIZABETH.*) Deawest Ba ! After all these years ! . . . But oh, my poor, poor Ba, how sadly you've changed ! So pale, so fwagile, so etheweal !

ELIZABETH : And you, Bella, are even lovelier than you promised to be as a child.

BELLA : Flattewer ! (*She kisses ELIZABETH's hand, and still holding the hand, rises to her feet.*) You hear that, Ha'wy ? This is my dear, dear Ha'wy. Mr. Bevan—Miss Elizabeth Ba'wett.

BEVAN (*bowing*) : Delighted, Miss Barrett, charmed. . . .

BELLA (*stretching out her free hand to BEVAN. He takes it*) : No, no, Ha'wy, you must take her hand. . . . (*Tenderly to ELIZABETH*) Such a little hand ! So fwail ! So spiwitual !

BEVAN (*taking ELIZABETH's hand and bowing over it*) : And the hand that penned so much that is noble and eloquent ! . . . I am honoured, Miss Barrett.

ELIZABETH : Thank you. And may I congratulate you ?—both of you ? I hope you will be very happy.

BEVAN : Thank you, Miss Barrett. I am indeed a fortunate man !

BELLA : Dear Ha'wy. Dear Ba.

ELIZABETH : But won't you sit down ? . . .

[BELLA, ARABEL, and BEVAN *seat themselves.*  
OCTAVIUS *stands near the window.*

BELLA : I adore your poems, Ba—especially when dear Ha'wy weads them ! He wead me “ Lady Gewaldine's Courtship ” the day after we became engaged. He weads so beautifully ! And he *too* adores your poems—which ought to please you, as he is dweadfully cwitical !

BEVAN : Oh, come, come, my pet !

BELLA : Oh, but Ha'wy, you are ! He doesn't quite appwove of even Mr. Alfwed Tennyson's poems.

ELIZABETH : Really, Mr. Bevan ?

BEVAN : I have nothing against them as poetry, no indeed. Mr. Tennyson always writes like a gentleman. What grieves me, Miss Barrett, is that his attitude towards sacred matters is all too often an attitude tinged with doubt.

ARABEL : How sad. . . .

BEVAN : Sad indeed, Miss Arabel ! and I grieve to say a very prevalent attitude among the younger men of to-day. Loss of faith, lack of reverence, and a spirit of mockery, seem to be growing apace. Of course, I am not alluding to Mr. Tennyson when I say this. His work is always reverent even when expressing doubt. Now your poems, my dear Miss Barrett, show no touch anywhere of these modern tendencies. There's not a line in one of them that I would disapprove of even dear Bella reading.

ELIZABETH : That—that's very satisfactory. . . .

BELLA : Dear Ha'wy is so fwightfully earnest !

BEVAN : Oh come, come, my pet. . . .

OCTAVIUS : I say, Mr. B-Bevan, you've not yet met my father, have you ?

BEVAN : No, that pleasure is yet to come.

OCTAVIUS : I think you and he would g-get on famously together !

BEVAN : Indeed ?

BELLA : Oh yes ! for dear Uncle Edward is fwightfully earnest as well ! Mamma has often told me so. . . . But there is one matter on which they are bound to differ. Like Mamma and Papa, dear Uncle Edward is a stwict Nonconformist, Ha'wy.

BEVAN (*sadly*) : Ah, ah, indeed. . . .

ELIZABETH : Then you are a member of the Church of England, Mr. Bevan ?

BEVAN : I am indeed, Miss Barrett. Like Bella, I was brought up in Dissent. But Oxford changed all that. A dear friend of mine persuaded me to attend the services at St. Mary's, where Doctor Newman preaches, you know ; and to study Pusey's works. . . . Two years ago I was received into the Church.



ARABEL (*in a scared voice*) : Pusey . . . Doctor Pusey. . . . But, Mr. Bevan, you're not—you're not——

BELLA : Oh, but he is, dear Awabel, and so am I ! We're both Puseyites ! Of course, dear Mamma and Papa were fwightfully distwessed about it at first, and feared my change of faith was entirely due to dear Ha'wy's influence. But in weality, I had long felt a lack of *something* in Nonconformity. . . . Don't you think it lacks *something*, dear Ba ? Don't you feel it's a form of worship less suited to people in our walk of life than to the lower orders ?

ELIZABETH (*with a quickly suppressed little laugh*) : No, I—I can't say it ever struck me quite like that. . . . But now tell me, dear, when is the wedding to be ? Or am I being indiscreet ?

BEVAN : Not at all, dear Miss Barrett, not at all. We——

BELLA (*excitedly*) : Oh, that weminds me ! Where's dear Henwietta ? . . . The wedding ? Early in August. (*Looks round the room*) Where's Henwietta ?

OCTAVIUS : At the moment she's d-downstairs entertaining a friend.

BELLA : Oh, I wanted to ask her—— A fwiend ? Not that tall gentleman we passed in the hall ?

ELIZABETH : Yes, Captain Surtees Cook.

BELLA : Oh, in the Army ? How thwilling ! I thought his ca'wiage was militawy ! So he's a fwiend of dear Henwietta ?

ELIZABETH : Yes. . . . You wanted to ask Henrietta something ?

BELLA : Oh, yes ! Oh Ba, I do so want her to be one of my bwidesmaids ! Do you think——

[HENRIETTA *enters*. *She is visibly distraite*.  
BELLA *jumps to her feet*.

Henwietta ! (*Taking both her hands*) Henwietta darling, I was just saying—— Oh, you must be one of my bwidesmaids ! you simply must !

HENRIETTA : Bridesmaids ? Oh yes—at your wedding. I should love to, Bella. It's sweet of you to ask me. And of course I will—if Papa—— But I'm sure he won't mind. . . .

BELLA : Mind ? Uncle Edward ? Why should he mind ?

HENRIETTA : No, no, I'm sure it will be all right. I don't see how he could possibly object.

BELLA : Object ? But I don't understand ! . . . Isn't she funny, Ba ? You're only asked to be a bwidesmaid, darling—not a bwide !

HENRIETTA : Yes, I know, but—— Oh, it's so hard to explain. . . .

BEVAN (*gravely helpful*) : Perhaps Mr. Barrett looks on bridesmaids as frivolous irrelevancies at so solemn a sacrament as marriage . . . ?

HENRIETTA : No, no, Mr. Bevan. It's not that. It's—(*the words suddenly rush out*) It's simply that nothing—nothing at all in this house must happen without Papa's sanction. You know he once owned slaves in Jamaica. And as slavery has been abolished there, he carries it on in England. I'm quite serious. We are all his slaves here.

ARABEL : Henrietta !

[BEVAN and BELLA look astonished and embarrassed.]

HENRIETTA : Well, aren't we ? Aren't we, Occy ? Aren't we, Ba ? We can't move hand or foot without his permission. We've got to obey his least whim and fall in with his moods—and they're as changeable as the weather ! We haven't a soul of our own, not one of us . . . ! I tell you, Bella, it's more than likely that he'll refuse to let me be your bridesmaid, for no

rhyme or reason—except that he's out of temper !

OCTAVIUS : I say, what about t-tea ?

ARABEL (*rising quickly*) : Oh yes, yes !

HENRIETTA : Tea is quite ready. I'm sorry—I—I forgot to tell you.

OCTAVIUS : Good Heavens, let's h-hurry or Captain Cook will have swallowed it all !  
(*Crosses to the door and opens it.*)

HENRIETTA : He's gone. . . . (*She moves to the window and stands there, her face half averted.*)

BELLA : *A wivederci*, deawest Ba ! (*Kisses her.*)  
It's been so lovely seeing you ! May I come soon again ? And next time I shall want you all to myself—without Ha'wy, I mean.

ELIZABETH : Come whenever you like, dear.

BEVAN : But why must I be excluded ?

BELLA : Because I've heaps and heaps to tell dear Ba about a certain big, big man who might easily gwow conceited if he heard me !

BEVAN : Oh, come, come, my pet.

[*BELLA takes ARABEL'S arm. BEVAN bows over ELIZABETH'S hand.*]

Good-bay, dear Miss Barrett.

ELIZABETH : Good-bye. It was nice of you to come and see me.

BEVAN : Not at all. I have long been looking forward to the honour of meeting you. Good-bay.

[*BELLA, her arm still in ARABEL'S, kisses her hand to ELIZABETH.*]

BELLA : *Au wevoir*, darling !

ELIZABETH : *Auf wiedersehen.*

[*BELLA and ARABEL go out.*]

BEVAN (*turning and bowing at the door*) : Good-bay.

ELIZABETH : Good-bye.

[BEVAN goes out. OCTAVIUS, turning at the door, bows to ELIZABETH, in imitation of BEVAN, and follows him. ELIZABETH smiles, and glances at HENRIETTA, who still stands with averted face at the window ; then she takes up a book and starts reading. A pause. Suddenly HENRIETTA turns on her.

HENRIETTA (*vehemently*) : Well, why don't you say something ?

ELIZABETH (*coldly*) : What do you want me to say ?

HENRIETTA : Nothing. . . . Oh Ba, don't scold me ! (*Goes to ELIZABETH, and sits on the floor beside her sofa.*) I know I deserve it. I have been dreadful. But I couldn't help it. I'm so miserable.

ELIZABETH (*quickly*) : Miserable, dear ?

HENRIETTA : Yes—and so—so wildly happy ! . . . Ba dear, may I tell you about it ? I oughtn't to, I know. Because if it should ever come to anything, and Papa asks if you had any idea of what was going on, you'll have to lie—which you hate doing—or admit that you knew. And then he'd vent half his rage on you for not warning him in time.

ELIZABETH : Never mind, dear. Go on.

HENRIETTA : Surtees has just asked me to marry him.

ELIZABETH : Oh Henrietta ! But——

HENRIETTA : And, of course, I accepted him—and said that I couldn't. And I had to tell him that we must never see each other again. When he calls here to-morrow, we shall have to——

ELIZABETH : You're not talking sense, child. What really *has* happened ?

HENRIETTA : I don't know . . . except that we both love each other terribly. . . . Oh Ba, what *are* we to do ? Surtees has only just enough money to keep himself decently. And, of course,



I haven't a penny of my own. If only I had your four hundred a year, I might defy Papa and leave the house and marry Surtees to-morrow !

ELIZABETH : And what earthly good is that money to me ? I'd give it to you, and how gladly——

HENRIETTA : I know you would, darling ! But that's utterly impossible ! Just think what your life would be like if Papa knew that you had made it possible for me to marry ! No. But isn't it a cruel irony that the only one of the family with the means to be free and happy hasn't any use for it ? (*With sudden urgency*) Ba dear, is there anything—anything at all—to be said for Papa's attitude towards marriage ? Can it possibly be wrong to want a man's love desperately—and—and to long for babies of my own ?

ELIZABETH : No. . . . But who am I to answer a question like that ? Love and babies are so utterly remote from my life. . . .

HENRIETTA : Yes, I know, dear. You're a woman apart. But love and babies are natural to an ordinary girl like me. And what's natural can't be wrong.

ELIZABETH : No. . . . And yet the holiest men and women renounced these things. . . .

HENRIETTA : I daresay. But I'm not holy. And come to that neither is Papa—not by any means ! Didn't he marry, and——

[*A knock at the door.*]

ELIZABETH : Come in.

[*WILSON enters.*]

WILSON : Mr. Robert Browning has called, Miss.

ELIZABETH (*breathlessly*) : Mr.—Mr. Browning . . . ?

WILSON : Yes, Miss.

HENRIETTA : Then I'd better be off !

ELIZABETH (*agitated. Quickly*) : No—no, stay here. I can't see him. I—I don't feel up to it. I can't—

HENRIETTA : But Ba, what on earth is the matter ? You told me yesterday—

ELIZABETH : I know. I know. But I really don't feel that I can see him now. (*To WILSON*) Tell Mr. Browning I am very sorry but I am not well enough to receive him.

HENRIETTA : But that's not true, Ba ! You can't send him away like that, dear. It would be too rude and unkind after having asked him to call, and all the efforts he has made to get here. (*To WILSON*) Where is Mr. Browning ?

WILSON : I showed him into the library, Miss.

ELIZABETH : But I—I'd much—much rather not see him. . . .

HENRIETTA : Oh fudge ! You're not a silly schoolgirl ! I'll bring him up myself. Mr. Kenyon says he's wonderfully romantic-looking, and quite the dandy.

[HENRIETTA *goes out*.

ELIZABETH : Is—is my hair tidy ?

WILSON : Yes, Miss Ba.

ELIZABETH : Oh, please arrange the *couvre-pied*. . . .

[WILSON *arranges the couvre-pied*.

Thank you. . . . And, Wilson—no. . . . Thank you, that will do. . . .

WILSON : Yes, Miss. (*She goes out*.)

[ELIZABETH, *obviously in a state of strained nerves, awaits the coming of ROBERT BROWNING. A pause.*

HENRIETTA *enters*.

HENRIETTA : Mr. Robert Browning.

[ROBERT BROWNING *enters. He is a dark handsome man in the middle thirties, faultlessly, perhaps even a trifle foppishly, dressed. Over his shoulder he wears a cape fastened with a chain at the throat. He*



*carries his high hat, lemon-coloured gloves, and clouded cane. BROWNING's manner is sincere and ardent ; his speech rapid, voluble, and emphasised by free gestures. HENRIETTA goes out.*

BROWNING (*pausing for a moment a few steps beyond the threshold*) : Miss Barrett ? . . .

ELIZABETH (*stretching out her hand*) : How-do-you-do, Mr. Browning ?

BROWNING (*quickly lays aside his hat, cane and gloves, and crossing to the sofa, takes her hand in both of his*) : Dear Miss Barrett—at last ! (*Raises her hand to his lips*) At last !

ELIZABETH (*still all nerves, and rather overcome by the ardour and unconventionality of his manner*) : I—I've had to put off the pleasure of meeting you much longer than I wished. . . .

BROWNING (*still holding her hand*) : Would you ever have received me if I hadn't been so tiresomely insistent ?

ELIZABETH : As you know from my letters, I've not been at all well during the winter, and I——(*Realising that her hand is still in his, she gently withdraws it.*) But won't you take off your cape ?

BROWNING : Thank you. (*Unfastens his cape and lays it aside.*)

ELIZABETH : I—I hope you don't find the room very close, Mr. Browning ?

BROWNING : No, no. . . .

ELIZABETH : My doctor obliges me to live in what I am afraid must be to you a—a hot-house temperature. . . .

BROWNING (*who has thrown a quick glance round the room*) : Wonderful ! You may think, Miss Barrett, that this is the first time I've been here. You're quite wrong, you know !

ELIZABETH : But——

BROWNING : Quite wrong. I have seen this room more times than I can remember. It's as familiar

to me as my own little study at home ! Before I came in, I knew just how your books were arranged, just how that tendril of ivy slanted across the window-panes—and those busts of Homer and Chaucer are quite old friends, and have looked down on me often before ! . . .

ELIZABETH (*smilingly protesting*) : No, really—— !

BROWNING : But I could never make out who the other fellows were on the top of the wardrobe, and——

ELIZABETH (*laughing, and now quite at her ease*) : Oh come, Mr. Browning ! I know that dear Mr. Kenyon is never tired of talking about his friends ; but I can't believe that he described my poor little room to you in detail !

BROWNING (*seating himself beside her*) : I dragged all the details I possibly could out of him—and my imagination supplied the rest. Directly after I had read your brave and lovely verses I was greedy for anything and everything I could get about you.

ELIZABETH (*smilingly*) : You frighten me, Mr. Browning !

BROWNING : Why ?

ELIZABETH : Well, you know how Mr. Kenyon's enthusiasms run away with his tongue ? He and I are the dearest of friends. What he told you about poor me I quite blush to imagine !

BROWNING : You mean, Miss Barrett, about you—you *yourself* ?

ELIZABETH : I feel it would be hopeless for me to try to live up to his description.

BROWNING : He never told me anything about you—personally—which had the slightest interest for me.

ELIZABETH (*puzzled*) : Oh ?

BROWNING : Everything he could give me about your surroundings and the circumstances of your

life I snatched at with avidity. But all he said about *you* was quite beside the point, because I knew it already—and better than Mr. Kenyon, old friend of yours though he is !

ELIZABETH : But—— Oh Mr. Browning, do my poor writings give me so hopelessly away ?

BROWNING : Hopelessly—utterly—entirely—to *me* ! . . . I can't speak for the rest of the world.

ELIZABETH (*smilingly*) : You frighten me again !

BROWNING : No ?

ELIZABETH : But you do ! For I'm afraid it would be quite useless my ever trying to play-act with you !

BROWNING : Quite useless !

ELIZABETH : I shall always have to be—just myself ?

BROWNING : Always.

ELIZABETH : Oh . . . (*quickly*) And you too, Mr. Browning ?

BROWNING : Always—just myself ! (*He stretches out his hand ; she takes it with a smile. Then, with a sudden laugh*) But really, you know, Miss Barrett, I shan't be able to take much credit for that ! Being myself comes to me as easily as breathing. It's play-acting I can't manage—and the hot water I've got into in consequence . . . ! If life's to run smoothly we should all be mummers. Well, I can't mum !

ELIZABETH : Yes, I can well believe that now I know you. But isn't it extraordinary ? When you are *writing* you never do anything else but—play-act.

BROWNING : I know——

ELIZABETH : You have never been yourself in any one of your poems. It's always somebody else speaking through you.

BROWNING : Yes. And shall I tell you why ? I

am a very modest man. (*Quickly, after a slight pause*) I am really !

ELIZABETH (*with suppressed amusement*) : I didn't question it, Mr. Browning.

BROWNING : So modest, I fully realise that if I wrote about myself—my hopes and fears, hates and loves, and the rest of it—my poems would be intolerably dull.

ELIZABETH (*laughingly, vivaciously*) : Well—since we are pledged to nothing but the truth, I won't contradict that—until I know you better !

BROWNING (*with a laugh*) : Bravo !

ELIZABETH (*ardently*) : Oh, but those poems, with their glad and great-hearted acceptance of life—you can't imagine what they mean to me ! Here am I shut in by four walls, the view of Wimpole Street my only glimpse of the world. And they troop into the room and round my sofa, those wonderful people of yours out of every age and country, and all so tingling with life ! life ! life ! No, you'll never begin to realise how much I owe you !

BROWNING (*with emotion*) : You—you really mean that ?

ELIZABETH : Why, why, Mr. Browning—

BROWNING : But of course you do, or you wouldn't say it ! And you'll believe me when I tell you that what you have said makes up to me a thousand times over for all the cold-shouldering I've had from the public ?

ELIZABETH (*fiercely*) : Oh, it infuriates me ! Why can we never know an eagle for an eagle until it has spread its wings and flown away from us for good ? Sometimes—I detest the British public !

BROWNING (*lightly*) : Oh no, no ! Dear old British public ! At least it gives us generously the jolly pastime of abusing it ! And mind you,



Miss Barrett, I've an uneasy feeling that my style is largely to blame for my unpopularity.

ELIZABETH (*a little too eagerly*) : Oh, surely not !

BROWNING : Didn't we agree never to play-act with each other ?

ELIZABETH (*with a laugh*) : *Touché !* Well, perhaps, there *are* passages in your work a little invol—I mean a little too—too profound for the general reader.

BROWNING : Oh no ! it's not what I say, but how I say it.

ELIZABETH : Oh, but——

BROWNING : And yet to me it's all simple and easy as the rule of three ! And to you ?

ELIZABETH : Well . . . not *quite* always. Sometimes there *are* passages. . . . (*She picks up a book.*) I have marked one or two in your "Sordello" which rather puzzle me. Here, for instance . . . (*She opens the book and hands it to him.*)

BROWNING (*taking the book*) : Oh, "Sordello" ! Somebody once called it "a horror of great darkness" ! I've done my best to forget it. However—— (*He reads the passage to himself, smiling. The smile fades ; he passes his hand over his brow and reads it again. She watches him, covertly smiling. He mutters*) Extraordinary. . . . But—but a passage torn from its context. . . .

[*He rises and goes to the window, as though to get more light on the subject, and reads the passage a third time. ELIZABETH has some difficulty in suppressing her amusement. He turns to her with an expression of humorous chagrin.*]

ELIZABETH : Well ? . . .

BROWNING : Well, Miss Barrett—when that passage was written only God and Robert Browning understood it. Now only God understands it.

[*She laughs, and he joins in.*]



What do you say—shall we lighten this great darkness by pitching it on the fire?

ELIZABETH (*indignantly*) : No indeed ! We shall do nothing of the kind ! Please give me back the book.

[*He does so.*]

Such passages are only spots on the sun. I love “Sordello.”

BROWNING (*eagerly*) : You would ! Of course you would ! And shall I tell you why ? Because it's a *colossal failure*.

ELIZABETH : If by a failure you mean an attempt—yes ! you're right ! That's just why “Sordello” appeals to my very heart. I too am always making colossal attempts—and always failing.

BROWNING : Isn't one such failure worth a hundred small successes ?

ELIZABETH : Oh, a thousand and more !

BROWNING (*eagerly*) : You think so too ? But, of course, I knew that ! . . . Miss Barrett, you smiled when I told you that Kenyon had no need to describe you because I knew you through and through already. And what you have just said about success and failure proves to me finally how right I was. All Kenyon did was to fill in the background. I—I had painted the portrait—with the true soul of you, ardent and lovely, looking out of it.

ELIZABETH : Ardent and lovely ! And you think you know me ! (*With a bitter smile*) Oh, Mr. Browning—too often impatient and rebellious. . . .

BROWNING : Well, what of it ? I've no love for perfect patience under affliction. My portrait is the portrait of a woman, not a saint. Who has more right to be impatient and rebellious than you ?

ELIZABETH : Did Mr. Kenyon paint my background with a very gloomy brush ?

BROWNING : Old Rembrandt would have envied him !

ELIZABETH (*smilingly*) : Poor dear Mr. Kenyon ! He is more Royalist than the Queen herself ! I assure you my afflictions worry him a great deal more than they worry me. . . . I suppose he told you that I am a—a dying woman ?

BROWNING : We are all of us—dying.

ELIZABETH : And that our family life was one of unrelieved gloom ?

BROWNING : Yes, he hinted at something of the sort.

ELIZABETH : He really shouldn't say such things ! Frankly now, Mr. Browning, do you find me such a very pitiable object ?

BROWNING : I find you, as I expected to find you, full of courage and gaiety. . . . And yet, in spite of what you say, I'm not at all sure that Kenyon's colours were too sombre.

ELIZABETH : But——

BROWNING (*eagerly interrupting*) : No, no, listen to me. Those colours are not yet dry. They must be scraped off ! The whole background must be repainted ! . . . And if only you'll allow it—I must have a hand in that splendid work.

ELIZABETH : But, Mr. Browning——

BROWNING (*carried away*) : No, listen ! I'll dip my brush into the sunrise and the sunset and the rainbow ! You say my verses have helped you—they're nothing. It's I—I who am going to help you now ! We have come together at last—and I don't intend to let you go again.

ELIZABETH : But——

BROWNING : No, listen. Give me your hands. (*Bends forward and takes them.*) I've more life

than is good for one man—it seethes and races in me. Up to now I've spent a little of all that surplus energy in creating imaginary men and women. But there's still so much that I've no use for but to give ! Mayn't I give it to you ? Don't you feel new life tingling and prickling up your fingers and arms right into your heart and brain ?

ELIZABETH (*rather frightened and shaken*) : Oh please . . . Mr. Browning, please let go my hands. . . .

[*He opens his hands ; but she still leaves hers lying on his palms for a moment. Then she withdraws them, and clasping her cheeks, looks at him with wide, disturbed eyes.*]

BROWNING (*softly*) : Well ?

ELIZABETH (*a little shakily, with forced lightness*) : You—you are really rather an overwhelming person, and in sober truth, I'm——

BROWNING : No—don't tell me again that you are afraid of me ! You're not. It's life you're afraid of—and that shouldn't be.

ELIZABETH : Life ?

BROWNING : Yes.

ELIZABETH : Well, when life becomes a series of electric shocks . . . !

BROWNING (*smiling*) : Was it as bad as all that ?

ELIZABETH (*smiling*) : Indeed, yes ! Do you affect other people in the same way ?

BROWNING : They've often told me so.

ELIZABETH (*lightly*) : No wonder I hesitated about meeting you, much as I wanted to ! Something of your disturbing vitality must have come to me from your letters and poems. . . . You'll laugh at me, Mr. Browning, but do you know we very nearly didn't meet to-day after all ! When my maid told me you had arrived I was so panic-stricken that I all but sent down a message that I was too unwell

to receive you. And it was a big effort to pull myself together, and behave like a sensible woman, when you came into the room !

BROWNING : I think I must have been quite as nervous as you at that moment.

ELIZABETH : You, Mr. Browning !

BROWNING : Yes—and I'm anything but a nervous man as a rule. But that moment was the climax of my life—up to now. . . . Miss Barrett, do you remember the first letter I wrote to you ?

ELIZABETH : Yes indeed ! It was a wonderful letter.

BROWNING : You may have thought I dashed it off in a fit of white-hot enthusiasm over your poems. I didn't. I weighed every word of every sentence. And of one sentence in particular—this sentence : “ *I love your books with all my heart—and I love you too.* ” You remember ?

ELIZABETH (*lightly*) : Yes—and I thought it charmingly impulsive of you !

BROWNING (*almost with irritation*) : But I tell you there was nothing impulsive about it. That sentence was as deeply felt and anxiously thought over as any sentence I've ever written.

ELIZABETH : I hope I have many readers like you ! It's wonderful to think I may have good friends all the world over whom I have never seen nor heard of.

BROWNING : I am not speaking of friendship, but of love.

[ELIZABETH *about to make a smiling rejoinder.* No, it's quite useless your trying to put aside the word with a smile and a jest. I said love—and I mean love——

ELIZABETH : But really, Mr. Browning, I must ask you——

BROWNING (*swiftly interrupting her*) : I'm neither mad nor morbidly impressionable—I'm as sane



and level-headed as any man alive. Yet all these months, since first I read your poems, I've been haunted by you. And to-day you are the centre of my life.

ELIZABETH (*very gravely*) : If I were to take you seriously, Mr. Browning, it would, of course, mean the quick finish of a friendship which promises to be very pleasant to both of us.

BROWNING : Why ?

ELIZABETH : You know very well that love—in the sense you, apparently, use the word—has no place, and can have no place, in my life.

BROWNING : Why ?

ELIZABETH : For many reasons—but let this suffice. As I told you before, I am a dying woman.

BROWNING (*passionately*) : I refuse to believe it ! For if that were so, God would be callous, and I *know* that He's compassionate—and life would be dark and evil, and I *know* that it's good. You must never say such a thing again. I forbid you to.

ELIZABETH : Forbid, Mr. Browning ? . . .

BROWNING : Yes—forbid. Isn't it only fair that if you forbid me to speak of you as I feel, and I accept your orders, as I must, that I should be allowed a little forbidding as well ?

ELIZABETH : Yes, but—

BROWNING (*breaking in with sudden gaiety*) : Dear Miss Barrett, what a splendid beginning to our friendship ! We have known each other a bare half hour and yet we've talked intimately of art and life and death and love, and we've ordered each other about, and we've almost quarrelled ! Could anything be happier and more promising ? . . . With your permission, I'm going now. Mr. Kenyon impressed upon me to make my first visit as short as possible, as strangers tire you. Not that I'm a stranger !



—still I can see that you are tired. . . . When may I call again?

ELIZABETH (*a little dazed*) : I don't quite know . . . I——

BROWNING : Will next Wednesday suit you?

ELIZABETH (*as before*) : Yes, I—I think so. But perhaps it would be better——

BROWNING : Next Wednesday then.

ELIZABETH : But——

BROWNING : At half past three again?

ELIZABETH : Yes—but I——

BROWNING (*bowing over her hand*) : *Au revoir* then.

ELIZABETH : Good-bye.

BROWNING (*gently masterful, retaining her hand*) : *Au revoir*.

ELIZABETH (*a little breathlessly, after a slight pause*) : *Au revoir*.

BROWNING : Thank you.

[*He kisses her hand, turns and picks up his hat and cape, etc., and goes out.*]

*The moment after the door has closed behind him ELIZABETH sits up and clasps her face with both her hands. Then she slips off the sofa and unsteadily gets on to her feet. With the help of the table and the chairs, she manages to cross the room to the window. Grasping the curtain to support herself, she stands looking down into the street after the departing BROWNING, her face as alive with excitement and joy as though she were a young girl. And the Scene slowly closes.*

•

## ACT III

ROBERT

*Some three months later.*

DOCTOR CHAMBERS *stands by the fireplace.*  
DOCTOR FORD-WATERLOW *sits on the sofa. He is a sharp-featured, sharp-tongued old man. Both DOCTORS are intently watching ELIZABETH as she walks with firm and sure tread across the room to the window and back again. FLUSH lies on the sofa.*

FORD-W. : Once again, if you please.

[ELIZABETH *walks across the room again.*

My dear Miss Barrett, I congratulate you. Now sit down. (*She sits close to him, and he feels her pulse while talking.*) When exactly was it you last called me in for consultation, Doctor Chambers.

CHAMBERS : Three months ago almost to a day.

FORD-W. : Yes, yes—and your patient was in a very low condition at the time. Well, you've done wonders, Doctor.

CHAMBERS : Oh, mine was just the ordinary spade-work. Honesty compels me to give most of the credit to another.

FORD-W. : Eh ?

CHAMBERS : The real healer is no one but Miss Barrett herself.

ELIZABETH : But, Doctor . . . !

CHAMBERS : I mean it, my dear, I mean it. Three months ago you seemed more than a little inclined to let life and the world slip through your pretty fingers. Then slowly the change began. Oh believe me, I was watching you like a lynx ! Life and the world became more and more worth grasping. The wish to live is better than a dozen physicians—as I think even my distinguished friend will admit.

FORD-W. : The wish to live. . . . Hm, yes. . . . And you are able to get about and take the air occasionally nowadays ?

ELIZABETH : Oh yes, Doctor. I have visited some of my friends, and been for several delightful drives round the Park. The only bother is getting up and down stairs. I'm inclined to lose my head going down, and I'm not yet able to undertake the upward journey.

FORD-W. : Quite so. Quite so.

CHAMBERS (*smilingly*) : Fortunately it doesn't need a very strong man to carry you.

ELIZABETH : Oh, but that's where you're wrong ! (*To FORD-WATERLOW*) You have no idea how I am putting on weight !

FORD-W. : Is that so indeed ?

CHAMBERS (*solemnly*) : So much so, that I have seriously thought of docking Miss Barrett's porter—a beverage, I may say, of which she is inordinately fond.

ELIZABETH (*laughing*) : I wonder you're not ashamed to mention that subject, Doctor Chambers !

FORD-W. : Well now, about the future, Miss Barrett. I fully agree with Doctor Chambers that another winter in London must, if possible, be avoided. If you continue picking up strength as you are doing, I see no reason against your travelling South by October, say.

ELIZABETH (*with barely controlled eagerness*) : Travelling . . . South ? . . .

FORD-W. : To the Riviera, or, better still, to Italy.

ELIZABETH (*breathlessly*) : Italy . . . ! Oh, Doctor, do you really mean it ?

FORD-W. : Why not ? You could travel there by easy stages. I have been given to understand that you have set your heart on Italy, and that there are no—er—practical difficulties in the way of your going there.

ELIZABETH : If by practical, you mean financial—none at all. I have my own little income, and——

FORD-W. : Quite so, quite so.

CHAMBERS : I've taken the liberty to tell Doctor Ford-Waterlow of the only real difficulty in the way of your wintering abroad, and he is quite prepared to deal with—him.

FORD-W. : Quite—and drastically.

ELIZABETH (*quickly*) : Oh, I am sure that won't be necessary ! Papa may not raise any kind of objection. It depends how he is feeling at the time, and——

FORD-W. (*testily*) : Fiddlesticks, my dear young lady ! Mr. Barrett's feelings are neither here nor there. All that matters is his daughter's health and happiness, as I intend to make clear to him. Quite clear.

ELIZABETH : Oh, you mustn't think that Papa isn't kindness and generosity itself. But gentlemen have their moods. . . . Italy ! Oh, it's hard to take in even the bare possibility of going there ! My promised land, Doctor, which I never thought to see otherwise than in dreams !

FORD-W. (*rising*) : Well, well, let us hope realisation won't bring disillusion along with it ! A grossly overrated country to my mind. Nothing but heaps of rubbish, dust, flies, stench, and beggars ! Good-bye, my dear Miss Barrett. No, please don't get up. (*Takes her hand.*) I'm delighted with your improvement. Delighted. And now for a little talk with your father. Good-bye.

ELIZABETH : Good-bye, Doctor.

CHAMBERS : Good-bye, Miss Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH : Good-bye.

[*Both DOCTORS go out.*]

ELIZABETH *clasps her cheeks and whispers :*



Italy—Italy—Italy. . . . (*She picks up FLUSH*)  
And you're coming with us, too, Flushy ! We'll  
see Rome together, Florence, Venice, Vesu-  
vius——

[ARABEL enters. ELIZABETH puts FLUSH down  
and jumps to her feet.]

Arabel ! (*Embracing ARABEL impetuously*) It's all  
but settled, my dear ! I'm to go to Italy ! He  
says that I shall be quite fit to travel by October !  
. . . . Rome ! Florence ! Venice ! Vesuvius !  
Raphael ! Dante ! " Sordello " ! . . . Oh, I don't  
know what I'm saying—I'm quite off my head  
with excitement !

ARABEL : How wonderful for you ! I'm so glad !  
. . . And you think Papa will consent ?

ELIZABETH : But of course he will ! Both the  
Doctors are putting it before him as strongly as  
they can. Oh, surely he'd never have the heart  
to refuse when he realises all this Italian trip  
means to me. . . .

ARABEL (*without conviction*) : No, dear, no. . . .

ELIZABETH : Have you seen him this afternoon ?

ARABEL : Yes.

ELIZABETH (*quickly*) : What was he like ?

ARABEL (*eagerly*) : Oh, quite sunny ! He called  
me " Puss "—and he never does that when he's  
in one of his moods. And afterwards, when  
Bella came in, he was really merry.

ELIZABETH : Thank Heaven for that !

ARABEL : Which reminds me, dear—Bella has  
brought the gown Henrietta is to wear as brides-  
maid. They want you to see it. They're trying  
it on now. . . .

ELIZABETH : Oh, I should love to ! (*She pulls the  
bell-rope.*) I want badly some distraction to help  
me over the suspense of waiting for Papa's  
decision. . . .



ARABEL : Somehow I feel, Ba, that it wasn't altogether wise of you to keep this Italian plan secret from Papa, and then spring it suddenly on him.

ELIZABETH : Yes, I know, but——

*[A knock at the door.]*

Come in.

*[WILSON enters.]*

Please tell Miss Hedley and Miss Henrietta I shall be delighted to see them now.

WILSON : Yes, Miss.

ELIZABETH : Oh, and take Flush out. He gets so excited when there are several people in the room.

*[WILSON picks up FLUSH and goes out with him.]*

It was Doctor Chambers himself who advised me to say nothing to Papa until *both doctors* were satisfied that I was absolutely fit to travel. I quite agreed with him at the time. But now—oh Arabel, I'm not so sure now ! I'm so afraid Papa may think——

*[Voices and laughter outside.]*

Don't say anything about this to them. . . .

*[ARABEL nods.]*

BELLA (*outside*) : May we come in ?

ELIZABETH (*rising*) : Come in, dear.

*[BELLA flutters in followed by HENRIETTA, shy but radiant, in her bridesmaid's array.]*

Bella dear !

BELLA (*embracing ELIZABETH*) : Darling, darling ! Oh but you weally shouldn't get up to weceive little me !

ARABEL (*contemplating HENRIETTA*) : How perfectly lovely !

ELIZABETH : Delicious !

BELLA : Yes, isn't it ? Isn't she, I should say ! Dear Henwietta will be quite the pwettiest of

my bwidesmaids. Indeed, I'm afwaid she'll dwaw all eyes from the little bwide ! At any wate, all the gentlemen's ! . . . But, darling Ba, you weally mustn't stand about like this !  
(*Leads her to the sofa.*)

ELIZABETH : But I'm as well able to stand as anyone nowadays.

BELLA (*as ELIZABETH submits to be laid on the sofa*) : No, no . . . ! One has only to see your dear face, so twansparent and spiwitual, to know how near you are to Heaven. You always have a look in your eyes, darling, as though you alweady saw the angels !

HENRIETTA : She's looking at me, Bella—and I'm no angel !

BELLA : No, I'm afwaid you're not. . . . But you're vewy, vewy beautiful ! . . . And fancy, Ba, if I hadn't spoken to Uncle Edward myself, I should never have had her for my bwidesmaid !

ELIZABETH : Yes, my dear, you certainly have a way with you.

HENRIETTA : *Spoken* to Papa ! I like that ! Why, you sat on his knee and stroked his whiskers.

ARABEL (*reprovingly*) : Henrietta dear !

[ELIZABETH *laughs*.

BELLA : And why not. Isn't he my Uncle ? . . . Besides that, I think he's most fwightfully thwilling ! I adore that stern and gloomy type of gentleman. It's so exciting to coax and manage them. And so easy—if you know how ! And I weally think I do. . . . But what I can't understand is his extwaordinawy attitude towards love and ma'wiage, and all that. It isn't as if he were in any way a mis—mis—oh, what's the howwid word ?

ELIZABETH : Misogynist ?

BELLA : Yes, and——

HENRIETTA : Well, *I* should describe him as the king of misogynists !

BELLA : But he *isn't*, I tell you.

HENRIETTA : How do *you* know ?

BELLA : Never mind. But I *do* know. . . . Besides, didn't he mawwy himself—and, what's more, have eleven childwen ? . . .

[*An uncomfortable silence.*]

Oh, have I said anything—vewy dweadful ?

ARABEL : No, dear—but, perhaps, not quite nice. When God sends us children it's not for us to enquire how and why. . . .

BELLA : I'm so sowwy ! I didn't mean to be i'wevewent. . . . But I *do* find dear Uncle Edward's attitude extwaordinawy—and so useless ! For in spite of it—and wight under his nose—and all unknown to him—his whole house is litewally seething with womance !

ARABEL : Bella !

HENRIETTA (*sharply*) : What on earth do you mean ?

BELLA : *You* ought to know, darling.

HENRIETTA : I ?

BELLA (*enthusiastically*) : I think Captain Surtees Cook is quite fwightfully thwilling ! The way he looks at you, dear—and looks—and looks—and looks ! . . . If he ever looked at *me* like that my knees would twemblem so that I shouldn't be able to stand, and I'd get the loveliest shivers down my back !

ARABEL : Really, Bella !

HENRIETTA (*vexed and embarrassed*) : I've never met anyone who was able to pack more sheer nonsense into a couple of sentences than you.

BELLA : Haven't you, darling ? . . . And then, there's George ! *You* may not believe it, but *I'm* absolutely certain he has a thwilling understanding with your little cousin Lizzie. . . . And you weally mean to tell me that Charles and Miss what's-her-name are just mere

friends ? As for poor Occy—well, I don't mind telling you, in confidence, that my dear, dear Ha'wy is frightfully jealous of him. . . .

ARABEL : Mr. Bevan jealous of Occy ! But why ?

BELLA : Why indeed ? Aren't gentlemen silly ?

ELIZABETH (*laughing*) : What an extraordinary girl you are, Bella !

BELLA : Oh, I'm a frightfully observant little thing ! For instance, though you hardly ever mention his name, I know that Mr. Wobert Brown comes here to see you at least once every week. And at other times he sends you flowers. And he often brings little cakes for dear Flush. . . . Flush ! Oh, wouldn't it be frightfully interesting if only dear Flush could speak !

ARABEL : Good gracious, why ?

ELIZABETH (*coldly*) : But not so interesting as if Bella were occasionally silent.

BELLA : *Touché*, darling ! I know I'm a dreadful little wattle—but you don't really mind my quizzing you, do you ?

ELIZABETH : Not in the least.

BELLA (*to ARABEL*) : You see, dear Flush is the only witness of all that goes on at Ba's weekly *tête-à-tête* with the handsomest poet in England. He—Flush, I mean—ought to know a wonderful lot about poetry by this time ! For when two poets are gathered together they talk about rhymes and rhythms all the time ? Or don't they ? . . . I'm frightfully ignorant.

ELIZABETH : Oh, no, my dear ! On the contrary—you're "frightfully" knowing.

BELLA : Me ?

HENRIETTA : I hope to goodness you won't chatter any of this outrageous nonsense in front of Papa.

BELLA : Nonsense, is it ? Well, I've my own



little opinion about that ! . . . But, of course, I won't bweathe a word of it to Uncle Edward. I'm all on the side of womance, and the path of twue love, and all that. . . .

ARABEL (*solemnly*) : Bella, I regret to say it, but I think you are one of the few girls I know who would have benefited entirely under Papa's system of upbringing.

[ELIZABETH and HENRIETTA *laugh*.

BELLA : Ooh . . . what a thwilling thought ! He was always fwightfully stwickt, wasn't he ? Did he whip you when you were naughty ? How fwightfully exciting to be whipped by Uncle Edward !

[*A knock at the door. The BARRETT SISTERS are on the alert at once.*

ELIZABETH : Come in.

[BARRETT *enters*. BELLA *jumps to her feet with a little scream and runs up to him.*

BELLA : Oh, Uncle Edward ! (*She thrusts her hand through his arm and snuggles against him.*) Uncle dear, if I had been your little girl instead of Papa's would you have been te'wibly severe with me ? . . . You wouldn't, would you ? Or would you ?

BARRETT : Would — wouldn't — wouldn't — would ? Are you trying to pose me with some silly riddle ?

BELLA (*drawing him into the room*) : No, no, no. Sit down. (*Pushes him into a chair and perches herself on his knee.*) It's like this—— But why that gloomy fwown, Uncle Edward ? . . . (*She passes her fingers lightly over his forehead.*) There—there—all gone !

[BARRETT *has slipped his arm round her waist.*

Awabel says it would have done me all the good in the world to have been bwrought up by you. She thinks I'm a spoilt, fwivolous little baggage, and——



ARABEL : Bella ! I never said anything of the sort !

BELLA : I know you didn't. But you *do* ! (*Points to HENRIETTA and ELIZABETH*) And *you* do. And *you* do. . . . But *you* don't, Uncle, do you ?

ARABEL : Really, Bella——

BARRETT (*speaking to BELLA, but at the others*) : If my children were as bright and open and affectionate as you are I should be a much happier man.

BELLA : Oh, you mustn't say such things, or they'll hate me . . . !

BARRETT (*drawing her close. The two seem to be quite withdrawn from the others and oblivious of them*) : And you're a distractingly lovely little creature. . . .

BELLA : Anything w'ong in that ?

BARRETT : I didn't say so. . . .

BELLA : Then why do you look at me so fiercely ? Do you want to eat me up ?

BARRETT : What's that scent you have on you ?

BELLA : Scent ? Me ? (*Giggling and snuggling up to him*) Don't you like it ?

BARRETT : I abominate scent as a rule—but yours is different.

BELLA : Nice ?

BARRETT : It's very delicate and subtle. . . . Still, I should prefer you not to use it.

BELLA : Why ?

BARRETT : Never mind. (*Gently but audibly smacks her thigh.*)

BELLA : Ooh—that hurts !

BARRETT : Nonsense.

BELLA (*triumphantly*) : But I never use scent ! I haven't a dwop on me. I think it's ho'wid and common ! (*With her arms round his neck*) Oh

Uncle, you're a darling ! You've called me  
bright and open and affectionate, dis-  
tinctly lovely and fawgawant all within a few  
minutes ! You may kiss me !

[BARRETT kisses her twice so roughly on the  
mouth that she gives a little cry. Then he pushes her  
abruptly off his knee and gets to his feet. She looks  
a little frightened.]

BARRETT (*brusquely*) : There, there, child, run  
away now. I want to speak to Ba. (*To the others*)  
You can go too. (*He crosses to the window and  
stands looking out, with his back to the room.*)

BELLA (*in a rather injured voice*) : Good-bye,  
Uncle.

BARRETT (*without turning*) : Good-bye.

BELLA : Good-bye, Ba.

[*With a little toss of her head, she goes out.*]

ELIZABETH : Good-bye.

[HENRIETTA and ARABEL go out.]

A pause. ELIZABETH looks with nervous expectancy  
at her father, who still stands at the window with  
his back to the room.

BARRETT (*without turning*) : When is the wed-  
ding ?

ELIZABETH : The wedding ? Oh, Bella's . . .  
On the twenty-seventh.

BARRETT (*turning, and speaking half to himself*) :  
Good. Less than a fortnight. . . . We are not  
likely to see much of her till then. And after-  
wards—well, she'll be living in the country most  
of the year.

ELIZABETH : But I thought you were so fond of  
her, Papa.

BARRETT (*sharply*) : Fond of her ? Why not ?  
Isn't she my niece ? . . . But she's a disturbing  
influence in the house. To see your brothers  
following her about with their eyes—especially  
Octavius. . . . Faugh ! the room is still full of

her ! I shall be glad when she's gone. . . . But I don't want to talk about Bella. Your doctors have just left me.

ELIZABETH (*expectantly*) : Yes, Papa . . . ?

BARRETT (*with forced heartiness*) : Their report is excellent. Astonishing. I'm more than gratified. I'm delighted. . . . Of course, my poor child, it's unlikely that you will ever be a normal woman. Even Chambers—optimistic fool though he is—was forced to admit that. . . . By the way, who is this Doctor Ford-Waterlow ?

ELIZABETH : I've been told he is one of the cleverest physicians in London.

BARRETT : Really ? . . . Well, he needs some amazing qualities to counterbalance his execrable manners. But even this medical phenomenon is unable to account for the sudden improvement in your health. Puts it down to Chambers' ministrations—which is, of course, arrant nonsense.

ELIZABETH : Perhaps the wonderful weather we've been having has most to do with it. I always thrive in warmth and sunshine.

BARRETT : Rubbish. Last summer was sweltering, and you have never been worse than then. No, to my mind, there is only One whom we have to thank—though this Doctor what's-his-name was pleased to sneer when I mentioned—Him.

ELIZABETH : Him ?

BARRETT : I mean Almighty God. . . . It amazes me, Elizabeth, that you, on whom this miracle of recovery has been worked, should ascribe it to mere earthly agencies. Haven't I knelt here night after night and implored our all-loving Father to have compassion on His child ? . . . It amazes me. It grieves me unspeakably. That is all I have to say for the present. (*He turns to the door.*)

ELIZABETH : Papa.

BARRETT : Well ?

ELIZABETH : Didn't Doctor Ford-Waterlow speak to you about—about next winter ?

BARRETT : Doctor Ford-Waterlow talked, if I may say so, a great deal of nonsense. (*He turns to go.*)

ELIZABETH : But Papa——

BARRETT (*testily*) : What is it ?

ELIZABETH : Didn't he tell you that I should avoid spending next winter in England ?

BARRETT : Well ?

ELIZABETH : And that he thinks I shall be fit to travel to Italy in October, if you——

BARRETT : So ! It's out at last ! And how long has this precious plot been hatching, may I ask ?

ELIZABETH : It's now several weeks since Doctor Chambers first mentioned Italy as a real possibility.

BARRETT : I see. And do your brothers and sisters know anything of this delightful project ?

ELIZABETH : I believe I mentioned it to them.

BARRETT : You believe you mentioned it to them. And Mr. Kenyon, and Mr. Horne, and the Hedleys, and that charlatan Browning—all your friends and relations in short—you've discussed your plans with the lot of them, I suppose ?

ELIZABETH : Oh, Papa, what does it matter ? My only reason——

BARRETT : Matter ? Not in the least ! It's nothing at all that I alone should be shut out of my favourite daughter's confidence—treated like a cipher—ignored—insulted——

ELIZABETH : Insulted ?

BARRETT : Grossly insulted. When that fellow, Ford-Waterlow, sprung your carefully prepared



mine on me and I naturally expressed my astonishment and displeasure, he became extremely offensive, and——

ELIZABETH : Believe me, Papa, my one reason for not worrying you with this Italian idea before was——

BARRETT : The fear that I should nip it in the bud at once. Exactly. I quite understand.

ELIZABETH : But—— .

BARRETT : No. I beg you to spare me explanations and excuses. The whole miserable business is abundantly clear. I am cut to the heart that *you*—the only one of my children whom I trusted implicitly—should be capable of such underhand conduct.

ELIZABETH : No—no——

BARRETT : If returning health must bring with it such sad change of character I shall be driven to wish that you were once more lying helpless on that sofa. There is nothing more to be said. (*He turns to the door.*)

ELIZABETH (*with restrained anger*) : But there is more to be said, and I must beg you to listen to me, Papa. How many years have I lain here ? Five ? Six ? It's hard to remember—as each year has been like ten. And all that time I've had nothing to look forward to, or hope for, but death.

BARRETT : Death . . . ?

ELIZABETH : Yes, death. I was born with a large capacity for happiness—you remember me as a young girl ?—and when life brought me little happiness and much pain, I was often impatient for the end, and——

BARRETT (*outraged*) : Elizabeth ! I'm shocked that——

ELIZABETH (*swiftly*) : And now this miracle has happened ! Day by day I am better able to take and enjoy such good things as everyone



has a right to—able to meet my friends, to breathe the open air and feel the sun, and see grass and flowers growing under the sky. . . . When Doctor Chambers first spoke to me of Italy I put the idea from me—it seemed too impossibly wonderful ! But as I grew stronger, it came over me, like a revelation, that Italy wasn't an impossibility at all, that nothing really stood in the way of my going, that I had every right to go——

BARRETT : Right ?

ELIZABETH : Yes ! every right—if only I could get your consent. So I set about consulting my friends, meeting all obstacles, settling every detail, so as to have a perfectly arranged plan to put before you after the Doctors had given you their opinion. In my eagerness I may have acted stupidly, mistakenly, tactlessly. But to call my conduct underhand and deceitful is more than unkind. It's unjust. It's cruel.

BARRETT (*more in sorrow than in anger*) : Self ! Self ! Self ! No thought, no consideration, for anyone but yourself, or for anything but your pleasure.

ELIZABETH (*passionately*) : But Papa——

BARRETT (*with a silencing gesture*) : Didn't it even once occur to you that all through those long, dark months you proposed to enjoy yourself in Italy, your father would be left here utterly alone ?

ELIZABETH : Alone ?

BARRETT : Utterly alone. . . . Your brothers and sisters might as well be shadows for all the companionship they afford me. And you—oh, my child, don't think that I haven't noticed that you, too, now that you are stronger and no longer wholly dependent on me, are slowly drawing away from your father. . . .

ELIZABETH : It's not true !

BARRETT : It is true—and, in your heart, you know it's true.

ELIZABETH : No !

BARRETT : New life, new interests, new pleasures, new friends—and, little by little, I am being pushed into the background—I who used to be your whole world, I who love you—who love you——

ELIZABETH : But Papa——

BARRETT (*with a silencing gesture*) : No. There is nothing more to be said. (*He crosses to the window, looks out, then turns.*) You want my consent for this—Italian jaunt. I shall neither give it nor withhold it. To give it would be against my conscience as encouraging selfishness and self-indulgence. To withhold it would be a futile gesture. You are your own mistress. Even if I refused to pay your expenses, you have ample means of your own to carry out your intentions. You are at liberty to do as you wish. . . . And if you go, I hope you will sometimes spare a thought for your father. Think of him at night stealing into this room which once held all he loved. Think of him kneeling alone by the empty sofa and imploring the Good Shepherd to——

[*A knock at the door.*

Eh . . . ?

ELIZABETH (*with a start, her hand going to her heart*) : Oh. . . .

BARRETT (*testily*) : Who's that ? Come in.

[*WILSON enters.*

WILSON : If you please, Mr. Browning has called.

BARRETT (*under his breath*) : That fellow again . . .

WILSON : I showed Mr. Browning into the drawing-room, Miss, seeing as you were engaged.

ELIZABETH : Would you like to meet Mr. Browning, Papa ?

BARRETT : Certainly not. I should have thought you knew by this time that I never inflict myself on any of my children's friends. (*To WILSON*) You may show Mr. Browning up.

WILSON : Very good, sir.

[*She goes out.*]

BARRETT : Mr. Browning appears to consider this his second home.

ELIZABETH : I have not seen him since last Wednesday.

BARRETT : Indeed.

[*He goes out.*]

ELIZABETH *sits quite still, breathing quickly, her eyes fixed on the door.* WILSON *enters.*

WILSON : Mr. Browning.

[BROWNING *enters* and ELIZABETH *rises to receive him.* WILSON *goes out.*]

BROWNING (*taking both her hands*) : Oh, but how splendid ! This is the fourth time you've received me—standing !

ELIZABETH (*her whole manner has changed : she is all sparkle and life*) : If ever I receive you from my sofa again you may put it down to my bad manners and nothing else !

BROWNING : I will, with all my heart, I will ! And now, tell me quickly. I've been dithering with suspense all day. You've seen them ? What do they say ?

ELIZABETH : Doctor Ford-Waterlow was quite taken out of his grumpy self with astonished delight at my improvement.

BROWNING (*delightedly*) : Say that again !

ELIZABETH : Oh, must I ? The whole sentence ?

BROWNING : I should like to see it in letters of fire burning at me from each of these four walls !

This is the best moment I've had since I got your note giving me permission to call on you ! How many years ago was that ?

ELIZABETH : Three months.

BROWNING : Absurd ! We've always been friends. I've known you a lifetime and over ! So, he was quite taken out of his grumpy self with astonished delight, was he ? Splendid ! Of course, *I* never once doubted that you would turn the corner some day. The world isn't rich enough to afford the waste of such a life as yours ! But even *I* little dreamt recovery would be so rapid. And Italy ? Are both Doctors agreed about your wintering there ?

ELIZABETH (*with a note of reserve in her voice*) : Yes.

BROWNING : And when do they think you'll be fit for travelling ?

ELIZABETH : The middle of October—unless there's a relapse.

BROWNING : Relapse ? There isn't such a word ! October ! Extraordinary ! For you know, October suits my own plans to perfection.

ELIZABETH : *Your* plans ?

BROWNING : Don't you remember my telling you that I had thought of wintering in Italy myself ? Well, now I am quite decided. You see, I have practically made up my mind to remodel "Sordello." I should never be able to grapple with the task satisfactorily in England. Impossible to get the Italian atmosphere in a land of drizzle and fog ! May I call on you often in Italy ? Where do you intend to stay ?

[ELIZABETH *laughs*.

Why are you laughing ?

ELIZABETH : In Italy I'm afraid you'll need seven-league boots—when you call on me !



BROWNING : What do you mean ?

ELIZABETH : I shall be at 50, Wimpole Street next winter.

BROWNING : Here ?

ELIZABETH : Yes.

BROWNING : But didn't you tell me that both doctors——

ELIZABETH : Doctors may propose ; but the decision rests—elsewhere.

BROWNING : Your father ?

ELIZABETH : Yes.

BROWNING : He—he has vetoed the plan ?

ELIZABETH : No—not exactly. But I am quite sure that he—that it will be impossible for me to go.

BROWNING : But—didn't the doctors make it clear to him that this move of yours may mean all the difference between—life and death ?

ELIZABETH : I believe Doctor Ford-Waterlow spoke very forcibly.

BROWNING : Then, in Heaven's name——

ELIZABETH (*quickly, nervously*) : Oh, it's rather hard to explain to someone who doesn't know all the circumstances. . . . You see, Papa is very devoted to me, and——

BROWNING : Devoted ? . . .

ELIZABETH : Very devoted to me—and depends a lot on my companionship. He hasn't many points of contact with my brothers and sisters. If I were away for six months, he——

BROWNING (*visibly and audibly putting restraint on himself*) : Miss Barrett—may I speak plainly ?

ELIZABETH (*nervously*) : Oh, do you think you'd better ? I know—more or less—how you feel about this. But you don't quite understand the situation. How should you ?

BROWNING : Very well. Then I'll say nothing. . . . (*His control suddenly gives way : his words pour*

*out in a furious torrent.*) You tell me I don't understand. You are quite right. I don't. You tell me he is devoted to you. I don't understand a devotion that demands favours as if they were rights, demands duty and respect and obedience and love, demands all and takes all, and gives nothing in return—I don't understand a devotion that spends itself in petty tyrannies and gross bullying—I don't understand a devotion that grudges you any ray of light and glimpse of happiness, and doesn't even stop at risking your life to gratify its colossal selfishness ! Devotion ! Give me good, sound, honest hatred rather than devotion like that !

ELIZABETH : Mr. Browning—I must ask you——

BROWNING : Forgive me—but I won't be silent any longer ! Even before I met you, I knew that sickness wasn't the only shadow on your life. And all these months—though you never once breathed a syllable of complaint—I felt that other shadow deepening, and I've stood by, and looked on, and said nothing. Who was I to step in between you and the man nature, as an ugly jest, chose for your father ? A mere friend ! I might find you tired and sick after hateful scenes I could picture only too vividly—and I must pretend to know nothing, see nothing, feel nothing. Well ! I've done with pretence from to-day on ! I refuse any longer to let myself be gagged and handcuffed ! It's not just your comfort and happiness which are at stake now. It's your very life. And I forbid you to play with your life. And I have the right to forbid you.

ELIZABETH (*desperately*) : No—no—no . . . Oh, please don't say any more !

BROWNING (*with compelling ardour*) : The right. And you won't deny it—you're too utterly candid and true. At our first meeting you forbade me to speak of love—there was to be

nothing more than friendship between us. I obeyed you. But I knew well enough—we both knew—that I was to be much more than just your friend. Even before I passed that door, and our eyes first met across the room, I loved you—and I've gone on loving you—and I love you now more than words can tell—and I shall love you to the end, and beyond. You know that? You've always known?

ELIZABETH (*brokenly*) : Yes—yes—I've always known. . . . And now for pity's sake—for pity's sake—leave me.

BROWNING (*seizing both her hands*) : No.

ELIZABETH : Oh please . . . please . . . let me go. Leave me. We must never see each other again.

BROWNING : I shall never let you go. I shall never leave you. (*He draws her into his arms.*) Elizabeth . . . Elizabeth . . .

ELIZABETH (*struggling feebly in his embrace*) : No—no. . . . Oh Robert, have mercy on me. . . .

BROWNING : Elizabeth, my darling. . . . (*He kisses her ; and at the touch of his lips, her arms go round his neck.*)

ELIZABETH : Oh Robert, I love you—I love you—I love you. . . .

[*They kiss each other again. Then she sinks into a chair, and he kneels beside her holding her hands.*]

BROWNING : And yet you ask me to take my marching orders and go out of your life?

ELIZABETH : Yes, Robert, for what have I to give you? I have so little of all that love asks for. I have no beauty, and no health, and I'm no longer young. . . .

BROWNING : I love you.

ELIZABETH (*with restrained spiritual passion*) : I should have refused to see you again after our first meeting. For I loved you then, though I would have denied it—even to myself. . . . Oh,

Robert, I think Eve must have felt as I did when her first dawn broke over Paradise—the terror, the wonder, the glory of it ! I had no strength to put up any kind of resistance except the pitiful pretence of mere friendship. I was helpless, I was paralysed, with happiness I had never dreamt it was possible to feel. . . . That's my only excuse—and God knows I need one !—for not having sent you away from me at once.

BROWNING : I love you.

ELIZABETH : My life had reached its lowest ebb. I was worn out, and hope was dead. Then you came. . . . Robert, do you know what you have done for me ? I could have laughed when Doctor Chambers said that I had healed myself by wanting to live. He was right ! oh, he was right ! But he little knew what lay behind his words ! I wanted to live—eagerly, desperately, passionately—and only because life meant you—you—and the sight of your face, and the sound of your voice, and the touch of your hand. Oh, and so much more than that ! Because of you the air once more was sweet to breathe, and all the world was good and green again.

BROWNING (*kissing her hands*) : And with those words singing in my ears, I'm to turn my back on you and go ?

ELIZABETH : But, Robert, can't you—can't you see how impossible——

BROWNING : I've never yet turned my back on a friend or an enemy. Am I likely to turn it on you ?

ELIZABETH : But how is it all to end ? What have we to look forward to ? And how——

BROWNING : I love you—and I want you for my wife.

ELIZABETH : Robert, I can't marry you. How can I when——



BROWNING : Not to-day or to-morrow. Not this year, perhaps, or next. Perhaps not for years to come——

ELIZABETH : I may never be able to marry you.

BROWNING : What then ? If you remain to the last beyond my reach, I shall die proud and happy in having spent a lifetime fighting to gain the richest prize a man was ever offered.

This idea is  
expressed in  
one of his  
poems.

ELIZABETH : No—no ! Oh, Robert, put aside your dream of me—and look on me as I am. I love you too well to let you waste your manhood pursuing the pale ghost of a woman.

BROWNING : Do you think I'm a boy to be swept off my feet by an impulse ? or a sentimental dreamer blind to reality ? There's no man alive who sees things as they are with clearer eyes than I do, and has his feet more firmly planted on the earth. And I tell you, in all soberness, that my need of you is as urgent as your need of me. If your weakness asks my strength for support, my abundant strength cries out for your weakness to complete my life and myself.

ELIZABETH (*after a pause*) : Robert, have you thought what your position here would be like if you went on seeing me after to-day ?

BROWNING : Yes.

ELIZABETH (*quickly*) : We should have to keep our love secret from everyone lest a whisper of it get to my father's ears.

BROWNING : I know.

ELIZABETH : If he had the least suspicion that you were more than a friend, the door would be slammed in your face, my letters supervised, and my life made unbearable.

BROWNING : I know.

ELIZABETH : And you, my dear—you're as frank and open as the day—how would you enjoy coming here under false pretences, and all the

deceits, subterfuges, intrigues we'd be forced to use ?

BROWNING (*with an exultant laugh*) : I shall *detest* it—I shall *hate* it with all my heart and soul. And I thank God for that !

ELIZABETH : But Robert——

BROWNING : For it's splendid and right that I should suffer some discomfort, at least, for such a reward as you ! The immortal garland was never run for without dust and heat !

ELIZABETH (*bitterly*) : Immortal ! Oh Robert, fading, if not already faded ! (*He is about to protest.*) No, don't speak ! don't speak ! . . . (*She rises and goes to the window and looks, with unseeing eyes, into the street. After a moment she turns to him.*) Robert, if we were to say good-bye to-day, we should have nothing but beautiful memories of each other to last to the end of our lives. We should be unhappy ; but there are many kinds of unhappiness. Ours would be the unhappiness of those who have put love away from them for the sake of love. There would be no disillusion in it, or bitterness, or remorse.

BROWNING (*in a low, tense voice*) : Is it *you* who are speaking ?

ELIZABETH : What do you mean ?

BROWNING : I don't know you. I thought yours was the courage that dared the uttermost, careless of defeat. Here's life—*life*—offering us the best that life can give, and you dare not grasp at it for fear it will turn to dust in your hand ! We're to dream away the rest of our lives in tepid sadness rather than risk utter disaster for utter happiness. I don't know you. I never thought you were a coward !

ELIZABETH (*proudly, indignantly*) : A coward ? I ? (*With a sudden change of voice*) Yes, I'm a coward, Robert—a coward through and through. . . . But it's not for myself that I'm afraid. . . .

BROWNING (*going swiftly up to her and taking her in his arms*) : I know that, my darling.

ELIZABETH : What's another disaster, great or small, to me who have known little but disaster all my life ? But you're a fighter—and you were born for victory and triumph. If disaster came to you through me——

BROWNING : Yes, a fighter. But I'm sick of fighting alone. I need a comrade-at-arms to fight beside me—and——

ELIZABETH : Not one already wounded in the battle. . . .

BROWNING : Wounded—but undefeated, undaunted, unbroken. . . .

ELIZABETH : Yes, but——

BROWNING : What finer comrade could a man ask for ?

ELIZABETH : But Robert——

BROWNING : No.

ELIZABETH : But Robert——

BROWNING : No. (*And he kisses the protest from her lips as the Scene closes.*)

## ACT IV

### HENRIETTA

*Some weeks later.*

[ARABEL enters carrying FLUSH. She is in outdoor clothes and has her bonnet on.]

ARABEL (*standing in the open doorway and speaking*) : You had really better let Wilson help you up the last few stairs, Ba.

ELIZABETH (*outside*) : No ! No, Wilson, don't touch me !

ARABEL : But, my dear . . .

[ELIZABETH enters, bonneted and in outdoor clothes. She is breathless but triumphant. WILSON follows at her heels.]

ELIZABETH : There ! All the way up, and without one pause or help of any kind ! And I feel splendid—just a little out of breath, that's all. . . . (*She sways a little on her feet. Both WILSON and ARABEL stretch out hands to support her.*) No, don't touch me ! I'm perfectly all right. . . . (*She walks to the sofa and sits down, and takes her bonnet and gloves off during the following*) Now wasn't that a glorious triumph ? And you know, Wilson, I got out of the carriage and walked quite—two miles in the Park !

WILSON : Lor', Miss !

ARABEL : Ba dear . . . !

ELIZABETH : Well, one mile then. Anyhow, that's what I'm going to tell Doctor Chambers.

ARABEL : Really, Ba . . . !

ELIZABETH : Oh, my dear, Flush has muddied your gown disgracefully ! What a filthy state you're in, Flushy ! . . . You had better take him, Wilson, and get Jenny to bath him. He's not been properly washed for ages.

WILSON (*taking FLUSH from ARABEL*) : Very good, Miss Ba.



[WILSON goes out carrying FLUSH.

ELIZABETH (*pointing to a little heap of letters*) : Oh, the post has come. Please give me those letters, dear.

ARABEL (*handing her the letters*) : Why, that's Mr. Browning's hand-writing ! I'm sorry, I couldn't help seeing it, Ba. But aren't you expecting him this afternoon ?

ELIZABETH (*absently*) : Yes. . . . (*she tears open the letter and reads it, smiling to herself*). Yes, dear, he should be here very soon now. . . . This was just to wish me good-night.

ARABEL : To wish you good-night . . . ?

ELIZABETH : Yes, it was written yesterday evening.

ARABEL : Oh. . . .

ELIZABETH (*turning over the letters*) : Mr. Haydon—Miss Martineau—Mr. Horne—Oh ! . . . (*A sharp change coming into her voice.*) This is from Papa.

ARABEL (*anxiously*) : From Papa ! But he's returning to-day. . . .

ELIZABETH : Perhaps he's been detained. . . . (*She opens the letter.*)

ARABEL (*hopefully*) : Oh, do you think so ?

ELIZABETH (*she quickly scans the letter ; then in a voice of consternation*) : Oh ! . . . Oh Arabel ! . . .

ARABEL : What is it, dear ?

ELIZABETH : We're leaving.

ARABEL : Leaving ?

ELIZABETH : Yes—leaving this house. Leaving London. Listen—

[*A knock at the door and HENRIETTA's voice.*

HENRIETTA (*outside*) : May I come in, Ba ?

ELIZABETH : Come in, dear. (*In a hurried whisper to ARABEL*) Don't speak of this yet. . . .

[HENRIETTA enters.

HENRIETTA (*in great excitement*) : Oh, Ba, you must see him at once ! You positively must !

ELIZABETH : Him . . . ?

HENRIETTA : He's in his full regimentals. He's just been to St. James's to receive—or whatever you call it—his adjutancy—or something—from Queen Victoria herself. He's wonderful ! He's gorgeous ! May I bring him up here for you to look at ?

ELIZABETH : But——

HENRIETTA : Papa need never know. Oh, Ba, do let me ! You've never seen him yet—it's high time you met—and you couldn't see him to better advantage than now ! . . . I'm talking of Captain Cook, you know.

ELIZABETH : Yes, so I've gathered. But I can't see him now, dear. I'm expecting Mr. Browning any minute.

HENRIETTA (*crestfallen but resigned*) : Oh . . . then of course it's impossible. . . . But I tell you what, Ba ! I'll try to keep him until Mr. Browning goes. I don't think he'll mind. (*She hurries to the door, and throws over her shoulder*) You can keep your poet here as long as you like.

[*She goes out.*]

ELIZABETH (*with a short laugh that ends in a sigh*) : Yes, she had best make the most of her soldier while she can, poor darling. She is not likely to see much of him in the future. (*She takes up BARRETT's letter.*)

ARABEL : Oh, Ba, tell me quickly. . . .

ELIZABETH : He writes from Dorking. (*She reads*) “ *This is to let you know that we shall be leaving London on Monday, the 22nd of this month. I have taken a furnished house at Bookham, in Surrey, some twenty miles from London and six miles from Leatherhead, the nearest railway station. Whether we shall eventually make it our permanent home I have not yet*

decided. At any rate, we shall spend the winter there. You will benefit by the country air and the complete seclusion of your new surroundings. I have felt for some time now that your present feverishly restless mode of life in London will, if continued, affect you harmfully both physically and morally. I am writing this letter so that you may inform your brothers and sisters of my decision and tell them that I decline absolutely to discuss it when I return home to-morrow."—That's to-day.—"The matter is finally settled, and you and they will make such preparations as are needful for the move."

ARABEL : Oh, Ba ! . . .

ELIZABETH (*bitterly*) : That's not quite all. He finishes up with a characteristic touch of humour.

ARABEL : Humour ?

ELIZABETH : Yes. He signs himself—"Your loving Papa."

ARABEL : The twenty-second. That gives us barely a fortnight longer here.

ELIZABETH (*stormily*) : My "feverishly restless mode of life" !—a few drives, a few calls on my friends, a few visitors. . . . I wonder he doesn't describe me as a recklessly dissipated woman ! He made my going to Italy impossible. And now I am to be cut off any little pleasures I have begun to find here. (*She crumples up the letter and tosses it into the grate.*)

ARABEL : I know, dear, I understand—and I'm very sorry for you. . . . The change won't hit me so hardly. My only ties in London are my Mission work and district visiting. But you and Henrietta— (*She hesitates.*)

ELIZABETH : Well ?

ARABEL (*with sudden earnestness*) : Oh, Ba, don't be angry with me if I tell you that this move may, in the long run, be a blessing in disguise for you.

ELIZABETH : A blessing in disguise ! I seem to have been brought up on that pious *cliché* ! What do you mean ?

ARABEL : We all pretend to be ignorant of each others affairs in this house—except poor Henrietta's. It's safer so. And yet we know—we all know—that you and Mr. Browning—

ELIZABETH : Well ?

ARABEL : Oh, Ba, one has only to look at your face when you're expecting him—and again after he has left you. . . .

ELIZABETH (*proudly*) : I love him and he loves me. What of it ? Haven't I as much right to love and be loved as any other woman ?

ARABEL : Oh yes, dear—but how is it all to end ? So long as Papa's alive none of us will ever be able to marry with his consent—and to marry without it is unthinkable. And, in your case, it isn't only a question of Papa's consent. . . . Of course it's—it's wonderful how much stronger and better you are—you walked upstairs splendidly just now. . . . But—but—

ELIZABETH : But even if I can manage to walk up a few steps it doesn't mean that I shall ever be fit to marry—is that what you're trying to say ?

ARABEL : Oh Ba darling, it's because I love you so dearly, and don't want you to suffer, that I'm forcing myself to speak. I know very little about gentlemen—except that they all want to marry the ladies they fall in love with. I—I don't know Mr. Browning at all—but—But even great poets want to settle down in time, and have a home of their own, and a wife, and—and little ones. . . . It would be so dreadful if—

ELIZABETH (*springing to her feet*) : Oh, be quiet ! be quiet ! Do you suppose I haven't thought of



all that a thousand times already? (*She goes to the window and looks out.*)

ARABEL : I am sorry. . . . I—I didn't mean to interfere. All I want is to save you any—  
(*She notices that ELIZABETH is no longer listening, but is waving her hand to someone in the street, her face transformed with joy.*) Oh . . .

[*She rises and slips softly out of the room, unnoticed by ELIZABETH.*]

ELIZABETH (*turning*) : Mr. Browning has just—  
(*Realises the empty room*) Oh. . . .

[*Her eyes light on BARRETT's crumpled letter in the grate. She picks it up and smooths it out, her face emptied of joy. She puts it on the mantelpiece. A knock at the door.*]

Come in.

[BROWNING enters. They look at each other in silence for a moment ; then he goes up to her and takes her in his arms.]

BROWNING : My love.

ELIZABETH : Robert. . . .

[*They kiss.*]

BROWNING (*holding her at arm's length*) : You look tired, sweetheart. What have you been doing to-day?

ELIZABETH (*with forced lightness*) : I went for a drive—and a walk in the Park. And afterwards I ran all the way upstairs—without help, and without one stop.

BROWNING : Oh, but you know—— ! Of course, dearest, it's a splendid feat, and I'm proud of you ! . . . Come and sit down. (*Leads her to the sofa, and they sit down.*) Now, aren't you being a trifle too ambitious?

ELIZABETH : I don't think so. . . . I'm feeling wonderfully well. . . .

BROWNING : Look at me.

*[She looks at him.]*

What's the matter, Ba ?

ELIZABETH : Nothing. . . .

BROWNING : Has your father returned ?

ELIZABETH : No. We expect him to-day.

BROWNING (*taking her face in his hands*) : Those talking eyes of yours give you hopelessly away. Something has gone wrong. What is it ? You must tell me.

ELIZABETH : Read that letter on the mantelpiece, Robert.

BROWNING (*goes to the mantelpiece and takes BARRETT's letter*) : From your father ?

ELIZABETH : Yes.

*[He reads the letter ; then looks at her with a strange smile on his face.]*

Well ?

BROWNING (*still smiling*) : I think, by the look of it, you crumpled up this letter furiously in your little hand—and I'm quite sure you pitched it into the grate.

ELIZABETH : Yes, I did. But——

BROWNING : Why ?

ELIZABETH : Oh, Robert, don't you see what this means to us ?

BROWNING : Yes—and perhaps better than you do.

ELIZABETH : Better than I ? Oh, you mustn't deceive yourself ! You think this move will make little difference to us. You think you'll be able to ride over from London and see me almost as often as we see each other here. But you're wrong ! you're wrong ! You don't know Papa as I do. He's grown jealous of my life here, my pleasures and my friends—and I'm slowly and surely to be parted from them. I've felt this

coming for some time now. Oh, Robert, it will soon be made impossible for me to see you at all. . . .

BROWNING : This precious letter may mean all that. But it means a great deal more that you haven't as yet been able to grasp.

ELIZABETH : A great deal more . . . ?

BROWNING : It means that you will be in Italy before the month is out.

ELIZABETH (*in a whisper*) : Italy . . . ?

BROWNING : Yes—and with me.

ELIZABETH : Robert . . .

BROWNING : It means that we must be married at once.

ELIZABETH (*standing up*) : Do you know what you're saying ?

BROWNING : Yes, I know what I am saying. And I repeat it. We must be married at once. (*He goes up to her.*) My darling, listen to me—— (*He is about to take her hands.*)

ELIZABETH (*starting back*) : No ! Don't touch me ! What you say is madness ! . . . I can't marry you—I can never marry you.

BROWNING (*with a sudden blaze of passion*) : You can, and you shall ! You'll marry me if I have to carry you out of this house and up to the altar ! (*Controlling himself.*) Do you seriously imagine I'm going to allow myself to be elbowed out of your life now ? And just to satisfy the selfish jealousy of a man whom I no longer believe to be sane ? You ought to know me better by this time——

ELIZABETH (*quickly breaking in*) : Oh, Robert, it's not only Papa who stands between us. It's I—it's I . . .

BROWNING : We've gone into that a hundred times already, and——

ELIZABETH : Yes, and now we must go into it once again, and frankly, and for the last time.

BROWNING : But——

ELIZABETH (*silencing him with a gesture*) : Robert, it's no use deceiving ourselves. However much stronger I may become, I shall always remain an invalid. You tell me that you want me sick or well—and it's wonderful of you to say that, and I know you believe it. . . . But I—Robert, I'm not generous enough—I'm too proud, if you like—to accept what I feel through and through, in spite of anything you say, to be a sacrifice of your life and your manhood. As your wife I should be haunted day and night by thoughts of all the glorious things you would have enjoyed but for me—freedom, ease, adventure, and passionate love I—I could never really satisfy. . . .

BROWNING : No—no—listen——

ELIZABETH (*with all her soul in her voice*) : Oh Robert, I should be haunted by the ghosts of your unborn children. . . . When I read that letter my world seemed to fall to pieces. . . . But now I thank God that it came while we're still free, and have the strength to shake hands and say good-bye. . . . (*She stretches out her hand.*)

BROWNING (*with a complete change of manner, ignoring her hand, and speaking in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice*) : On the whole I think this will be our best plan of campaign. The family leave here on the—(*he consults the letter*)—on the twenty-second. So we have barely a fortnight to get everything done in. You told me last week that Mr. Hedley had invited your sisters to picnic in Richmond Park next Saturday. So the house will be conveniently empty. We'll meet at Mary-le-Bone Church, and be married quietly some time in the morning. I'll see about a licence at once, and interview the Vicar.

ELIZABETH (*who has been staring at him with bewilderment and fear*) : Robert——



BROWNING (*as before*) : It would be madness to leave England on the same day. You'll need all the rest and quiet you can get before the journey. So, directly after we are married, I think you had better return here and take things very easily for a day or two. You'll have six days if we leave on Saturday week. Now—— (*He takes a paper out of his pocket.*)

ELIZABETH : Oh stop ! I can't listen to you !

BROWNING (*as before, consulting the paper*) : For some time now I've kept careful note of the sailings from Southampton in case of just such an emergency as this. The Packet leaves the Royal Pier on Saturdays at nine o'clock. We must catch the five o'clock express at Vauxhall. It arrives at Southampton at eight.

ELIZABETH : Oh . . . (*She laughs wildly, the laugh changing into sobs.*)

[BROWNING takes her into his arms and draws her down beside him on the sofa. Her sobs gradually subside. She says brokenly :

And—and I always believed Papa was the most overbearing man in the world. . . .

BROWNING (*smiling*) : And yet you've known me for some time now !

ELIZABETH : But I mustn't give way, Robert—I mustn't—I daren't. . . .

BROWNING : There's one other thing, my darling, of the utmost importance that we must settle at once. You can't possibly travel without a maid. Wilson must have a pretty shrewd idea of our relations. You say she is entirely devoted to you. But do you think she will be willing to come abroad with us ?

ELIZABETH (*after a pause, in a low voice*) : Robert . . . have you ever thought that my strength may break down on the journey ?

BROWNING : Yes.

ELIZABETH : Suppose I were to—to die on your hands ?

BROWNING (*softly, after a slight pause*) : Are you afraid, Ba ?

ELIZABETH (*proudly, indignantly*) : Afraid ? I ? You know that I am not afraid ! You know that I would sooner die with you beside me than live a hundred lives without you. . . . But—but how would *you* feel if I were to die like that ? And what would the world say of you ? . . .

BROWNING (*quietly*) : I should be branded as little better than a murderer. And what I should feel I—I leave you to imagine . . .

ELIZABETH : And yet you ask me to come with you ?

BROWNING : Yes. I am prepared to risk your life—and much more than mine—to get you out of this dreadful house into the sunshine, and to have you for my wife.

ELIZABETH : You love me like that ?

BROWNING : I love you like that.

[*A long pause.*]

ELIZABETH : Robert . . . will you—will you give me a little time ?

BROWNING : Time is short, my dear.

ELIZABETH : Yes, I know. But I must have a little time. I can't decide now. I daren't. . . . I feel something *must* happen soon to show me definitely the way. . . . Give me a few hours. Before I sleep to-night I'll write and tell you my decision. . . . Please, Robert.

BROWNING : You promise me that ?

ELIZABETH : I promise.

BROWNING : Very well. . . .

ELIZABETH : Thank you.

BROWNING : Shall I go now ?

ELIZABETH : Please. . . .

*[He kneels and takes both her hands and presses them passionately to his lips. She receives the caress passively. He rises, and leaves the room in silence.]*

*She sits motionless staring before her. A pause. Then a light knock at the door. Another pause. Then a louder knock. ELIZABETH starts out of her thoughts.*

Come in.

[HENRIETTA enters.]

HENRIETTA : I saw Mr. Browning going down the stairs. . . . May I bring him in ?

ELIZABETH : Him ?

HENRIETTA : He's standing on the landing outside. . . . *(She gives ELIZABETH a little shake)* Wake up, Ba ! I'm talking of Surtees.

ELIZABETH : Oh yes, of course. . . . But won't some other time do as well ?

HENRIETTA : No ! No ! I told you he was in uniform. You promised to see him, Ba !

ELIZABETH *(with a sigh)* : Very well, dear. . . .

*[HENRIETTA kisses ELIZABETH impulsively ; then goes to the door and opens it.]*

HENRIETTA *(speaking into the passage)* : Come in, Surtees.

*[CAPTAIN SURTEES COOK enters : a huge, handsome, whiskered, frank-faced man. He is arrayed in the full splendour of his "regimentals" and carries his headgear under his arm.]*

Captain Surtees Cook, Ba.—My sister, Elizabeth.

*[ELIZABETH has risen to receive him. COOK clicks his heels together and bows stiffly.]*

COOK : Your servant, Miss Barrett.

ELIZABETH *(offering him her hand)* : How-do-you-do ?

COOK (*taking her hand and bowing over it*) : Greatly honoured, 'pon my word I am, Miss Barrett. Understand not everyone received here.

HENRIETTA : No indeed, Surtees ! With the exception of the family, very few gentlemen have ever been allowed in Ba's room.

COOK : Twice honoured in one day, y'know. First by Her Majesty ; now by you, Miss Barrett. Can't think what I've done to deserve it.

ELIZABETH : Oh, I had forgotten ! You've just come from the Palace. I have never seen the Queen. What is she like ?

COOK : Very little lady, Ma'am ; but royal every inch of her.

HENRIETTA : Surtees, you haven't got your sword on !

COOK : Not etiquette, as I told you, to wear it indoors.

HENRIETTA : Oh bother etiquette ! I want Ba to see you in full war-paint. Where did you leave it ?

COOK : In the hall.

HENRIETTA : I'll fetch it. (*Runs to the door.*)

COOK : No, but really—Miss Barrett doesn't want——

[HENRIETTA *goes out.*]

ELIZABETH : But indeed I do, Captain Cook ! I don't think I've ever seen an officer in . . . full war-paint before, except at reviews and ceremonies—and that was years ago.

COOK : Indeed ? (*After a short pause.*) Er—Miss Barrett . . .

ELIZABETH : Yes ?

COOK : Miss Barrett . . .

ELIZABETH (*encouragingly*) : Yes, Captain Cook ?

COOK : I say, Miss Barrett. . . .



ELIZABETH : You want to tell me something about Henrietta ?

COOK (*eagerly*) : Just so, Miss Barrett, just so. Exactly. You know, Miss Barrett—you know—— (*He is unable to go on.*)

ELIZABETH (*very kindly*) : Yes, Captain Cook, I know. And though I'm quite powerless to help, believe me, you have my heartfelt sympathy. (*She gives him her hand.*)

COOK (*taking it in both of his*) : Thank you. Thank you. More than I deserve. Thank you, Miss Barrett. Never was such a girl, y'know—Henrietta, I mean. Dunno what I've done to deserve——

[HENRIETTA enters with the sword. ELIZABETH and COOK are still holding hands.]

HENRIETTA : Oh yes, I thought he'd seize the opportunity to tell you something while I was out of the room. Did he really manage to get it out ?

ELIZABETH (*smiling*) : Perhaps, not quite. Did you, Captain Cook ?

COOK : Well—ah—y'know . . . Still, like most ladies—quick in the uptake. . . .

ELIZABETH : Yes, I understood. (*Kissing HENRIETTA.*) My dear, how I wish I could do something for you both !

HENRIETTA : Well, you can't, favourite daughter though you are ! Nobody can. (*She sits down with the sword across her lap.*) Surtees wants to ask Papa for my hand and all that—quite like the conventional suitor. I can't get it into his poor head that such things are simply not possible at 50, Wimpole Street.

ELIZABETH (*earnestly*) : Oh believe me, Captain Cook, it would be more than useless ! You would be peremptorily ordered out of the house

—and I don't know what would happen to Henrietta !

COOK : Quite aware that I'm not much of a match, Miss Barrett. Poor man, y'know. Little else than my pay. Still, quite respectable and all that. Decent family and all that. Should be more than willing, if necessary, to throw up soldiering and take to some money-making business, but——

HENRIETTA : And a fine mess you'd make of it, my poor dear !

COOK : Well, I'm not so sure about that. Admit, of course, that soldiering's my special job. Haven't the brain for much else, I'm afraid. Still, you never know what a fella can't do with a prize like Henrietta to reward his efforts. What d'you say, Miss Barrett ?

HENRIETTA : Oh Ba, can *you* make him understand ? I can't !

ELIZABETH (*very impressively*) : Captain Cook, if you were a Prince of Eldorado and came here courting, with a pedigree of lineal descent from some signory in the Moon in one hand, and a ticket of good behaviour from the nearest Independent Chapel in the other—even then, Papa would show you the door ! *Now* do you understand ?

COOK : Can't say I do.

HENRIETTA : Well, anyhow, you're not to speak to Papa, and I forbid you to give up soldiering. Now that I've seen you in your glory, do you suppose I should ever take you without your uniform ? Get up. I want to buckle on your sword.

COOK : Aw, I say—— (*Stands up, smiling rather sheepishly.*)

HENRIETTA (*getting to work*) : Ba thinks poets are the flower of manhood—a certain poet, at any rate. I mean to show her that she's mistaken. . . .

COOK : I say, you've got it wrong. Sword hangs from the left hip y'know.

HENRIETTA : Why ?

COOK : Well——

[BARRETT enters, and taking in the scene with a look of amazement, his face immediately hardens into a mould of freezing displeasure. Both GIRLS stare at him in consternation. COOK stands rigid.]

ELIZABETH : Papa. . . . You're—you're home earlier than I expected, Papa.

BARRETT : I don't think I have the privilege of this gentleman's acquaintance.

HENRIETTA : Captain Cook, may I introduce my father ? Papa—Captain Surtees Cook.

COOK : Your servant, sir.

[BOTH MEN bow stiffly.]

HENRIETTA (*after a short pause*) : Captain Cook is a great friend of George and Occy.

BARRETT : Indeed ? (*To Cook*) My sons are very rarely at home at this time of the day.

COOK : Fact is—just passing the house—thought I'd look in on the off chance, y'know, sir—finding one of them in and all that. . . .

BARRETT : I see.

ELIZABETH (*breaking a pause*) : Captain Cook has just come from Buckingham Palace . . . and Henrietta thought I should like to see him in all the splendour of his regimentals.

BARRETT : Indeed. (*Takes out his watch and looks at it.*)

COOK : Nothing much to look at, of course—but ladies like a bit of colour, and er—— By Jove, must be getting late !

BARRETT (*pocketing his watch*) : It's nineteen-and-a-half minutes past five.

COOK : By Jove ! High time I were moving. . . .

[BARRETT *pulls the bell-rope twice.*

Good-bye, Miss Barrett.

ELIZABETH : Good-bye, Captain Cook. (*She gives him her hand.*)

[BARRETT *crosses to the door and holds it open.*

COOK : Good-bye, Miss Henrietta.

HENRIETTA : I'll see you out.

[COOK *moves to the door followed by HENRIETTA.*

COOK (*to BARRETT*) : Your servant, sir.

[BARRETT *returns his bow in silence. COOK goes out and HENRIETTA is about to follow. BARRETT stays her with a gesture.*

HENRIETTA : I am seeing Captain Cook to the door.

BARRETT : The servant will attend to that.

[*He closes the door, and, in silence, crosses to the fireplace and takes up his stand in front of it. When he speaks he looks straight before him.*

Your list of gentlemen visitors appears to be lengthening, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH : This is the first time I have had the pleasure of meeting Captain Cook.

BARRETT : Indeed. But I infer, from what I saw as I came into the room, that Henrietta's acquaintance is of somewhat longer standing ? Or am I mistaken ?

HENRIETTA : I have known Captain Cook for some time now.

BARRETT : Ah. And since when has it been your custom to buckle on his accoutrements ?

HENRIETTA : I have never seen him in uniform before.

BARRETT : And I think it improbable that you will see him in uniform, or in mufti, very frequently in the future.



HENRIETTA (*in a strained voice*) : Why ?

BARRETT (*ignoring the question*) : Again I may be mistaken, but I was under the impression, Elizabeth, that notice should be given me before strangers visited you here.

ELIZABETH : One can hardly describe a friend of George and Occy as a stranger, Papa.

HENRIETTA : Is Captain Cook to be forbidden the house because I helped him on with his sword ?

BARRETT : (*to ELIZABETH, ignoring HENRIETTA*) : You received my letter ?

ELIZABETH : Yes, Papa.

BARRETT : What has just happened fully confirms me in the wisdom of my decision. This house is fast becoming a *rendezvous* for half London. I have neither time nor inclination to find out whether all the persons visiting here are desirable acquaintances for my children. Fortunately our new home is so far from town that your London friends are not likely to trouble us—at least, during the winter.

HENRIETTA (*blankly*) : Our new home ? . . .

BARRETT (*to ELIZABETH*) : You have not told your sisters ?

ELIZABETH : Arabel knows.

HENRIETTA : I don't understand. Are we—are we leaving Wimpole Street ?

BARRETT (*without looking at HENRIETTA*) : I have taken a house at Bookham, in Surrey. And we move in on the twenty-second.

HENRIETTA : Why ?

BARRETT : I am not in the habit of accounting for my actions to anyone—least of all, to my children.

HENRIETTA : But one thing I have a right to ask you, Papa. If Captain Cook is to be forbidden

to visit us, is it because you found him here in Ba's room and saw me fastening on his sword?

BARRETT (*after a slight pause, looking fixedly at her*) : I understood you to say that Captain Cook is George's friend and Occy's.

HENRIETTA : Yes . . . and my friend too.

BARRETT : Ah.

HENRIETTA : Yes, and since it was I who suggested his seeing Ba, and I who asked him to show me how to buckle on his sword, it's unjust to penalise him for——

ELIZABETH (*warningly*) : Henrietta . . .

BARRETT (*to HENRIETTA in a sharp low voice*) : Come here.

HENRIETTA (*she takes a few steps towards him and speaks, a little breathlessly*) : Yes, Papa . . . ?

BARRETT (*looks at her steadily under lowered brows for a moment, then points to the floor at his feet*) : Come here.

[*She goes right up to him, breathing quickly and fearfully. He keeps his eyes fixed on her face. Then in a low, ominous voice.*

What is this fellow to you?

HENRIETTA : I—I've told you. . . . He's a friend of ours.

BARRETT : What is he to you?

HENRIETTA : A—a friend. . . .

BARRETT : Is that all?

HENRIETTA : Yes.

BARRETT (*suddenly grasping her wrist, his voice like the crack of a whip*) : You liar!

ELIZABETH (*sharply*) : Papa . . . !

HENRIETTA (*gaspingly*) : Let me go!

BARRETT (*tightening his grip*) : What's this man to you? Answer me.

[*She tries to free herself and cries out.*

Answer me.

HENRIETTA : Oh Papa . . . please . . .

BARRETT : Answer me.

HENRIETTA : Oh don't . . . don't . . .

BARRETT : Answer me.

HENRIETTA (*in a strangled voice*) : He's—he's—oh, Papa, I love him——

BARRETT : Ah . . . (*Between his teeth, seizing her other wrist and forcing her to her knees*) Ah—you—you—you—— (*She gives a cry of pain.*)

ELIZABETH (*seizing BARRETT's arm*) : Let her go, Papa ! I won't have it ! Let her go at once !

[BARRETT *flings HENRIETTA off. She collapses in a heap on the floor, sobbing, her face buried in her hands.*

BARRETT (*turning on ELIZABETH*) : And you—you knew of this—filthiness ?

ELIZABETH : I've known for some time that Henrietta loved Captain Cook, and I've given her all my sympathy.

BARRETT : You dare to tell me——

ELIZABETH : Yes. And I would have given her my help as well, if I had had it to give.

BARRETT : I'll deal with you later. (*To HENRIETTA*) Get up.

HENRIETTA (*suddenly clasping his knees and speaking in a voice of passionate entreaty*) : Oh, Papa, please listen to me—please. I—I'm not a bad girl—I swear to you I'm not. I know I've deceived you—and I'm sorry—I'm sorry. . . . But I couldn't help it. I—I love him—we love each other—and if you'd known you would have turned him from the house. . . . Oh, can't you understand—won't you try to understand ? . . . He's poor—we don't expect to be married yet—but he's a good man—and it can't be wrong to love him. Other women love—why must I be forbidden ? I want love—I can't live without love. Remember how you loved Mamma and how she loved you—and—and you'll understand and pity me. . . .

BARRETT (*inexorably*) : Get up.

HENRIETTA : Have pity on me, Papa. . . .

BARRETT : Get up. (*He forcibly loosens her hold of his knees, and she staggers to her feet.*) Sit there. (*He points to a chair.*)

[*She drops into it, and sits listlessly with drooped head.*]

How long has this been going on ?

[HENRIETTA *says nothing.*]

Do you hear me ? How long have you been carrying on with this fellow ?

HENRIETTA : I—I've known him a little over a year.

BARRETT : And you've been with him often ?

HENRIETTA : Yes.

BARRETT : Alone ?

HENRIETTA : Yes.

BARRETT : Where ?

HENRIETTA : We—I—I've met him in the Park, and—and——

BARRETT : And—here ?

HENRIETTA : Yes.

BARRETT : Here. And alone ?

[HENRIETTA *is silent.*]

Have you met him in this house alone ?

HENRIETTA : Yes.

BARRETT : So ! Furtive unchastity under my own roof—and abetted by one whom I believed to be wholly chaste and good. . . .

HENRIETTA : No—no——

ELIZABETH (*fiercely*) : How dare you, Papa !

BARRETT : Silence ! (*To HENRIETTA, his voice hard and cold as ice*) : Now attend to me. Something like this happened a year or two ago, and I thought I had crushed the devil in you then. I was wrong. It needed sterner measures than I



had the courage to use. . . . So now, unless I have your solemn word that you will neither see nor in any way communicate with this man again, you leave my house at once, as you are, with nothing but the clothes you have on. In which case, you will be your own mistress, and can go to perdition any way you please. But of this you may be certain. Once outside my doors you will never again be admitted, on any pretext whatever, so long as I live. I think by this time you have learnt that it's not my habit to make idle threats, and that I never go back on my word. Very well. You have your choice. Take it.

HENRIETTA (*after an agonised mental struggle*) : Is it nothing to you that I—that I shall hate you for this to the end of my life ?

BARRETT : Less than nothing.

HENRIETTA : But—but I must let Captain Cook know that——

BARRETT : I will deal with Captain Cook.

HENRIETTA (*desperately*) : But Papa——

BARRETT : Will you give me your word neither to see nor to communicate with this man again ?

HENRIETTA (*after a pause, in a dead voice*) : I—I have no choice.

BARRETT : Give me your Bible, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH : Why ?

BARRETT : I am not prepared to accept your sister's bare promise. But I think even she would hesitate to break an oath made with her hand resting on the Word of God. Give me your Bible.

ELIZABETH : My Bible belonged to Mamma. I can't have it used for such a purpose.

BARRETT : Give me your Bible.

ELIZABETH : No.

BARRETT : You refuse ?

ELIZABETH : Yes.

[BARRETT pulls the bell-rope. A pause. No one speaks or moves. WILSON enters.

BARRETT : I want you to go to my bedroom and fetch my Bible. Are your hands clean ?

WILSON (*looking at her hands*) : My hands, sir ?

BARRETT : Are they clean ?

WILSON (*with a touch of asperity*) : Yes, sir. I've just been helping to bath Flush.

BARRETT : You will find the Bible on the table beside my bed.

WILSON : Very good, sir.

[*She goes out. All three are silent and motionless until she returns.*

WILSON *re-enters with BARRETT's Bible. She gives it to him and goes out.*

BARRETT (*to HENRIETTA, placing the Bible reverently on the table*) : Come here.

[HENRIETTA rises and goes to the table.

Place your hand upon the Book.

[*She does so.*

Repeat after me : " I give you my solemn word that I will neither see, nor have any communication with, Captain Cook again."

HENRIETTA (*in a toneless voice*) : I give you my solemn word that I will neither see, nor have any communication with, Captain Cook again.

BARRETT : You will now go to your room and remain there until you have my permission to leave it.

[*Without a word, but with her head held high, HENRIETTA goes out.*

(*After a pause*) Have you anything to say to me, Elizabeth ?

ELIZABETH : No.

BARRETT : Then I must leave you under my extreme displeasure. I shall not see you again,

I can have nothing to do with you, until God has softened your heart, and you repent of your wickedness, and ask for His forgiveness, and . . . mine.

*[He takes his Bible and goes out.]*

*The moment he has closed the door* ELIZABETH *gets up and pulls the bell-rope. She does so with an air of decision. A pause. WILSON enters.*

ELIZABETH : Shut the door, please. (*Impulsively*) Wilson, are you my friend ?

WILSON (*bewildered*) : Your . . . friend, Miss ?

ELIZABETH : Yes, my friend. I am in dire need of friendship and help at the moment.

WILSON : I—I don't quite understand, Miss Ba. . . . But I'm that fond of you—I'd do anything to help you.

ELIZABETH : You would ? And I know I can trust you ?

WILSON : Yes, indeed, Miss.

ELIZABETH : Wilson, next Saturday I am going to marry Mr. Browning.

WILSON (*with a gasp*) : Marry . . . !

ELIZABETH : Hush. . . . Yes. Of course nobody in this house knows—and nobody must know.

WILSON : Lor', Miss, I should just think not indeed !

ELIZABETH : We're to be married secretly at Mary-le-Bone Church. Will you come with me ?

WILSON : Me, Miss ? Yes, Miss—and gladly . . .

ELIZABETH : Directly afterwards I shall return here for a few days, and—

WILSON (*in boundless amazement*) : Here ! With Mr. Browning . . . !

ELIZABETH (*with an hysterical laugh*) : No—no—no ! Just alone with you. . . . Then, on the following Saturday, I shall join Mr. Browning, and

we're going abroad. . . . We're going to Italy.  
. . . . Will you come with us ?

WILSON (*in a whisper*) : To Italy . . . ?

ELIZABETH : Yes. . . . Will you come with me ?

WILSON : Well, Miss, I can't see as how I can help myself. Not that I hold with foreign parts—I don't. But husband or no husband, you'd never get to Italy alive without me.

ELIZABETH : Then you'll come ? Then you'll come ! Oh, I am so glad ! I'll tell Mr. Browning—I'm writing to him now. And I shall want you to take the letter to the post at once. Go and put on your things—I'll have finished by the time you're ready.

WILSON : Yes, Miss.

[WILSON goes out, and ELIZABETH takes pen and paper and starts writing rapidly as the Scene closes.]



# ACT V

PAPA

## SCENE I

ELIZABETH is kneeling beside Flush and fastening a lead on to his collar. She pats his head abstractedly, rises, and picks up a little heap of letters in their envelopes from the table, runs through them and places them on the mantelpiece. Then, with a shuddering sigh, she walks to the window, clasping and unclasping her hands in agitation. After standing at the window for a moment, she sighs again and returns to the mantelpiece, picks up the letters and replaces them one by one on the table. Her cloak and bonnet and gloves, etc., are on the bed.

WILSON hurries into the room with two travelling rugs on her arm.

WILSON : Oh, Miss Ba, I'm that sorry ! In my flurry to get the luggage off to the railway station yesterday I clean forgot to pack these rugs. And there was heaps of room in the carpet-bag.

ELIZABETH : Never mind.

WILSON (*placing the rugs across the back of a chair*) : I do hope we haven't forgotten nothing else.

ELIZABETH : And if we have it won't matter much. Mr. Browning insisted that we should travel as lightly as possible. We shall be able to get all we need in Paris.

WILSON : Lor', Miss, it don't seem possible we'll be in Paris to-morrow !

ELIZABETH : No. . . . (*She consults her watch.*) Oh, how the time crawls ! We've still an hour and a half of this dreadful waiting. . . . You're sure, Wilson, they quite understood at the livery stables exactly when, and where, the cab was to meet us ?

WILSON : Oh yes, Miss, I was most particular to see that the young man took it all down—the cab to be at the corner of Wimpole Street at ha'-past three punctual. It won't take us more than ten minutes to get to Hodgson's Library—and then Mr. Browning will have us in his charge. (*Her voice drops to a warm confidential tone.*) Your husband, Miss Ba dear . . .

ELIZABETH : Oh hush ! hush ! Don't breathe that word here. . . .

WILSON : But, Miss Ba——

ELIZABETH : I'm foolishly nervous, but I can't help it. The very walls seem to be listening. There is no one in the house, I know, except Miss Henrietta—and she should have gone out by now. Still——

WILSON : Miss Henrietta was putting on her bonnet as I came along the passage.

ELIZABETH : Oh Wilson, it's impossible to believe that in little more than an hour I shall have left this room, never, in all likelihood, to see it again. . . .

WILSON : And glad you'll be to see the last of it, I'm sure, Miss Ba.

ELIZABETH : Yes—and no. . . . I've been very miserable here, and very happy. . . . Oh, I wish it were time to go ! This waiting is killing me !

WILSON : Have you finished writing your letters, Miss ?

ELIZABETH (*almost hysterically*) : Yes. Yes. I've written to them all to tell them what I've done and to wish them good-bye. I've just been reading over my letter to Mr. Barrett to see if there was something I could add—something—anything. But I can't think—I can't think. . . .

WILSON : Least said, soonest mended, Miss. (*With a chuckling laugh*) Oh, Miss Ba, I know I shouldn't say such things—but there's a lot I'd give to be here to-night when the Master reads

your letter and knows you've been a married lady for almost a week. . . .

ELIZABETH (*quickly*) : Don't, Wilson, don't ! The very thought terrifies me ! I can see his face—I can hear his voice. . . . Thank God, we shall be miles and miles away. . . . (*She looks at her watch.*) An hour and twenty minutes still. Will time never pass ?

WILSON (*after a pause*) : Why don't you write some po'try, Miss ?

ELIZABETH (*dumbfounded*) : Poetry . . . ?

WILSON : Yes, Miss. That 'ud make the time pass nicely, I'm sure.

[ELIZABETH breaks into rather hysterical laughter. HENRIETTA enters in her shawl, and bonnet. She has a letter in her hand. ELIZABETH abruptly stops laughing, and looks at her with frightened eyes.]

ELIZABETH (*hastily turning her letters on to their faces*) : I—I thought you had gone out.

HENRIETTA : Wilson, I want to speak to Miss Ba.

WILSON : Yes, Miss.

[*She goes out.*]

HENRIETTA : I was just going when I ran into a messenger at the door. He brought this letter. It's for you.

ELIZABETH (*anxiously, reaching out her hand*) : For me ?

HENRIETTA (*retaining the letter*) : Yes. But it's in—in his hand-writing.

ELIZABETH : Captain Cook's ?

HENRIETTA : Yes.

ELIZABETH : Open it, dear.

HENRIETTA (*tears open the letter and reads*) : " Dear Miss Barrett, I know I am doing very wrong in drawing you once again into my, and Henrietta's, affairs. But the matter is so urgent I am sure you will forgive me. My regiment has been ordered to Somerset at short notice—and I must positively see Henrietta before

*I go. If I wrote to her direct, my letter would certainly be read by Mr. Barrett. I understand he opens all her correspondence. Hence my trespass on your kindness. Will you please give Henrietta the enclosed letter, and believe me your grateful and obedient servant, Surtees Cook."* . . . Somerset . . . (*She drops the letter, opens the enclosure and reads it eagerly. ELIZABETH picks up the letter and tears it into little pieces.*) What is the time?

ELIZABETH : A quarter past two.

HENRIETTA (*in a low, tense voice*) : You remember Papa threatened to turn me out of the house unless I swore on the Bible not to write to or see Surtees?

ELIZABETH : Yes.

HENRIETTA (*defiantly*) : Well, I'm going to break that "Bible oath" to-day.

ELIZABETH (*quietly*) : Are you, dear?

HENRIETTA (*More defiantly still*) : Yes—and I shall glory in breaking it! Surtees says he'll be at—never mind where!—between four and six—the only free time he has—*every* day until he leaves next Wednesday. We shall all have left here on Monday; so I must meet him either to-day or to-morrow. I shall meet him *both* days. And if Papa asks me where I have been—I shall go out of my way to lie to him as often and as grossly as I can.

ELIZABETH (*quietly*) : I see. Why do you tell me all this?

HENRIETTA (*belligerently*) : Because I want you to say that I'm a wicked, deceitful, perjured, *loose* woman, so that I can fling the words back in your face! (*Suddenly throws her arms round ELIZABETH.*) Oh Ba darling, forgive me! I'm not myself these days. I am all love and hate—and I don't know which is the worse torture. . . .

ELIZABETH (*with passionate tenderness*) : My dear, my dear, you think I don't understand! Oh, but



I do ! I do ! And I feel for you and pity you with all my heart ! . . . I can do nothing to help you. I daren't even advise you. . . . But never lose hope—never lose courage—never——

[*Wilson flashes into the room. She is in a state of uncontrolled agitation.*]

WILSON (*gaspingly*) : Oh, Miss Ba—Miss Ba. . . !

[*Both sisters stare at her, HENRIETTA astonished, ELIZABETH in terror.*]

ELIZABETH : What is it, Wilson ? (*To HENRIETTA*) Shut the door.

WILSON : The Master, Miss ! He—he's just come in. . . .

ELIZABETH (*in a whisper*) : Papa . . .

WILSON : Yes—just this minute. . . . He must 'ave 'eard—someone must have told him——

ELIZABETH : Be quiet.

HENRIETTA (*who has been looking in bewilderment from one to the other*) : But Ba, what on earth is the matter ?

ELIZABETH : Nothing. Nothing. It's—it's only that Papa hasn't been to see me for ten days now—ever since—you remember——? And—and scenes of forgiveness are always trying. . . . (*To WILSON, sharply*) Put away my hat and cloak. Quick.

[*WILSON does so.*]

HENRIETTA : I don't believe that's all. You're as white as a sheet. What did Wilson mean ? Ba, is there anything I can——

ELIZABETH (*softly, intensely*) : No, no, no ! Don't speak—don't ask me anything. . . . You know nothing—you understand ?—nothing—nothing.

HENRIETTA : But——

ELIZABETH : No. (*To WILSON*) Those rugs . . .

[*WILSON picks them up. There is a knock at the door. WILSON gasps. ELIZABETH speaks in a whisper.*]

Come in. (*She clears her throat, then louder*) Come in.

[BARRETT enters. *They are all standing in tense attitudes. ELIZABETH commands her voice.*

You're home early, Papa. . . .

[BARRETT, *without replying, looks at each of the three in turn ; then crosses to the fireplace. WILSON, obviously terror-stricken, slips out of the room, the rugs over her arm.*

BARRETT (*to ELIZABETH*) : What's the matter with that girl ?

ELIZABETH : Wilson ?

BARRETT : Yes. . . . And with you ?

ELIZABETH : Nothing, Papa. . . .

BARRETT (*after staring broodingly at her for a moment, he turns to HENRIETTA*) : Where have you been ?

HENRIETTA : Nowhere.

BARRETT : Where are you going ?

HENRIETTA : To tea with Aunt Hedley.

BARRETT : Is that the truth ?

HENRIETTA : Yes.

BARRETT : You remember your oath ?

HENRIETTA : Yes.

BARRETT : Have you kept it ?

HENRIETTA : Yes.

BARRETT : Are you going to keep it ?

HENRIETTA : Yes.

BARRETT (*after staring at her for a moment*) : I want to speak to your sister. You can go.

[*Without a glance at either of them, HENRIETTA goes out. ELIZABETH sits perfectly still, waiting. BARRETT walks to the window ; then turns and goes up to her.*

Do you know why I am back so early ?

ELIZABETH (*in a whisper*) : No, Papa.

BARRETT (*in a low, intense voice*) : Because I could bear it no longer. . . . It's ten days since last I saw you. . . .

ELIZABETH : Am I to blame for that, Papa ?

BARRETT (*with restrained fury*) : You dare to ask me such a question ? Weren't you a party in your sister's shameless conduct ? Haven't you encouraged her ? Haven't you helped her ? Haven't you defended her ? And did you expect to go scot-free of my displeasure ? (*Stopping himself with a violent gesture*) I've not come to speak about that—but to put it behind me—to forget it—to forget it. . . . I wonder, my child, have you been half so miserable these last ten days as your father ?

ELIZABETH : Miserable, Papa ?

BARRETT : Do you suppose I'm happy when I'm bitterly estranged from all I love in the world ? Do you know that night after night I had to call up all my will-power to hold me from coming here to forgive you ?

ELIZABETH : Papa——

BARRETT : All my will-power, I tell you—all my sense of duty and right and justice. . . . But to-day I could bear it no longer. The want of your face and your voice became a torment. I had to come. I am not so strong as they think me. I had to come. And I despise myself for coming—despise myself—hate myself. . . .

ELIZABETH : No—no ! (*Suddenly rises and puts her hands on his shoulders.*) Oh, Papa, can't you see, won't you ever see, that strength may be weakness, and your sense of justice and right and duty all mistaken and wrong ?

BARRETT (*hoarsely, taking her hands from his shoulders*) : Mistaken and wrong ? What do you mean ? . . . (*Quickly stopping her from speaking*) No, be silent. Don't answer me. . . . Mistaken

and wrong? You don't know what you're saying.

ELIZABETH : If you'll only listen to me, Papa, I——

BARRETT : No.

ELIZABETH : But, Papa——

BARRETT : No. (*He moves to the window and stands there, his face half averted from her. A pause. He turns.*) If there were even a vestige of truth in what you say, my whole life would be a hideous mockery. For always—through all misfortunes and miseries—I've been upheld by knowing, beyond a doubt, what was right, and doing it unflinchingly, however bitter the consequences. . . . And bitter they've been—how bitter, only God knows ! It's been my heavy cross that those whom I was given to guide and rule have always fought against the right that I knew to be the right—and was in duty bound to impose upon them. . . . Even you. Even your Mother.

ELIZABETH (*in a whisper*) : My Mother ? . . .

BARRETT : Yes, your Mother. . . . But not at first. . . . You—you, my eldest child, were born of love and only love. . . . But the others—long before they came the rift had begun to open between your Mother and me. Not that she ever opposed me—never once. Or put into words what she felt. She was silent and dutiful and obedient. But love died out—and fear took its place—fear. . . .

ELIZABETH (*sharply*) : No ! No !

BARRETT : And all because I saw the right—and did it.

ELIZABETH (*in a low voice, staring before her*) : Oh . . . oh dear God, what she must have suffered. . . .

BARRETT : She ?—She ? . . . And what of me ? What of me ?



ELIZABETH : You ? . . . Oh Papa, then you—you still loved her—after her love for you had died ? . . .

BARRETT (*in a muffled voice, looking aside*) : Love . . . ? What's love ? . . . She was my wife. . . . You—you don't understand. . . .

ELIZABETH (*in a horrified whisper*) : And all those children . . . born in fear. . . . Oh, it's horrible—it's horrible—it's horrible. . . . (*With a shuddering sob, she covers her face with her hands.*)

BARRETT (*aghast and embarrassed*) : Ba, my dear—don't—don't . . . I—I shouldn't have spoken—I shouldn't have told you all that. . . . Forget it, child. . . . (*He goes up to her*) Take your hands from your face. . . . (*He gently touches her wrists.*)

[*She starts away from him, looking at him with wide, frightened eyes.*

Don't look at me like that. (*In a low, thick voice, averting his eyes*) You don't understand. How should you ? You know nothing of the brutal tyranny of—passion, and how even the strongest and best are driven by it to Hell. Would you have abetted your sister in her——

ELIZABETH (*fiercely*) : Henrietta's love—how dare you speak of it in the same breath as——

BARRETT (*brutally*) : Her love ? You ignorant little fool ! What do you know of love ? Love ! The lust of the eye—the lowest urge of the body——

ELIZABETH (*springing to her feet*) : I won't listen to you !

BARRETT (*seizing her wrists and forcing her back to her seat*) : You must—you shall ! It's time a little reality were brought into your dream of life. Do you suppose I should have guarded my house like a dragon from this so-called love if I hadn't known, from my own life, all it entails of cruelty and loathing and degradation and remorse ? . . .

(*He pulls himself together.*) With the help of God, and through years of tormenting abstinence, I strangled it in myself. And so long as I have breath in my body, I'll keep it away from those I was given to protect and care for. You understand me?

ELIZABETH (*in a low voice, looking him full in the face*) : Yes—I understand you . . . I understand you. . . .

BARRETT : Very well.

[*A pause. ELIZABETH sits quite still looking before her. When he speaks again his voice has changed.*]

This has been a hateful necessity. I had to speak — plainly — lest your very innocence should smirch the purity I am utterly resolved to maintain in my home. . . . And because I feel that you acted in innocence and ignorance, I—I forgive you freely, my child. . . . We must turn over this ugly page—and forget what was on it. . . . (*He takes her hand.*) You're—cold as ice. . . . Why are you trembling?

ELIZABETH (*drawing her hand from his*) : I shall never forget what you have said.

BARRETT : Never forget—but—— And yet, perhaps that's as well. . . . (*With sudden urgency*) But for God's sake, my darling, don't let this raise any further barrier between us ! I've told you how all these past months I've seemed to feel you slipping little by little away from me. . . . Your love is all I have left to me in the world.

ELIZABETH : You had Mamma's love once. You might have had the love of all your children.

BARRETT : Yes, if I'd played the coward's part, and taken the easier way, and shirked my duty. I'd rather be hated by the whole world than gain love like that.

ELIZABETH (*in a broken voice*) : Oh Papa, you—you don't know how I pity you. . . .

BARRETT (*roughly*) : Pity ? I don't want your pity. . . . But if I should ever lose you or your love—— (*He seizes her unwilling hands.*) My darling, next week we shall have left this house, and I hope we shall never return here. I've grown to loathe it. In our new home we shall draw close to each other again. There will be little to distract you in the country—nothing and no one to come between us. (*He draws her stiffening form into his arms.*) My child, my darling, you want me to be happy. The only happiness I shall ever know is all yours to give or take. You must look up to me, and depend on me, and lean on me. You must share your thoughts with me, your hopes, your fears, your prayers. I want all your heart and all your soul. . . . (*He holds her passionately close ; she leans away from him, her face drawn with fear and pain.*)

ELIZABETH (*sobbingly*) : I can't bear it—I can't bear any more. . . . Let me go, Papa—please let me go. . . .

[*He loosens his embrace, and she falls away from him, her arm covering her face. He rises and bends over her.*]

BARRETT : Forgive me, dear. I've said too much. I was carried away. I'll leave you now.

ELIZABETH (*in a whisper*) : Please . . .

BARRETT : Shall I see you again to-night ?

ELIZABETH (*as before*) : Not to-night. . . .

BARRETT : I shall pray for you.

ELIZABETH (*half to herself*) : Pray for me ? . . . To-night. . . . (*She turns and looks up at him.*) Yes, pray for me to-night—if you will. . . .

[*He kisses her forehead gently, and goes out. She sits for a moment looking before her, and then, with frightened eyes, round the room. She whispers :*

I must go at once—I must go—I must go. . . . (*She gets up quickly, and fetches her cloak and bonnet from the wardrobe.*)

[WILSON *enters, stealthily and hurriedly, the rugs on her arm.*

WILSON : He's gone to the study.

ELIZABETH (*putting on her bonnet*) : We must go. Now. At once.

WILSON : But, Miss Ba——

ELIZABETH : At once. Help me on with my cloak.

WILSON (*doing so*) : But the cab won't be there yet—not for an hour. Besides——

ELIZABETH : Then we must walk about the streets. I can't stay here any longer. I'm frightened. I'm frightened. Fetch your cloak and bonnet.

WILSON : Walk about the streets, Miss ? You can't—you can't. Besides—the Master's at home. He may see us leaving. For God's sake, Miss——

ELIZABETH : Where did I put those letters ? Ah, here. . . . (*Spreading them out on the table*) Fetch your cloak and bonnet. Quick.

WILSON : But if he saw us leaving——

ELIZABETH : We must chance that.

WILSON : But, Miss Ba——

ELIZABETH : He can't stop me. I don't belong to him any more. I belong to my husband. Papa can kill me. But he can't stop me.

WILSON : I daren't, Miss, I daren't.

ELIZABETH : Then I must go alone.

WILSON : You can't do that.

ELIZABETH (*with compelling earnestness*) : Wilson, things have passed between my father and me which force me to leave this house at once. Until to-day I didn't realise quite how unforgivably I have been driven to deceive him. Until to-day—I've never really known him. He's not like other men. He's—dreadfully



different. . . . I—I can't say any more. . . .  
If you want to draw back you need never  
reproach yourself. This, after all, is no affair of  
yours. But I must go now.

WILSON : I'll fetch my cloak and bonnet at  
once, Miss.

[ELIZABETH puts her arm round WILSON's neck  
and kisses her.

Oh, Miss Ba . . .

[WILSON goes out quickly. ELIZABETH spreads the  
letters on the table. Then, from a ribbon on  
which it is hung, she draws her wedding ring from  
her bosom. She slips it on to her finger ; looks at it  
for a moment ; then pulls on her gloves. WILSON  
re-enters, softly and quickly, in cloak and bonnet.

ELIZABETH : I am quite ready. You take the  
rugs, Wilson. I had better carry Flush.

WILSON (*breathlessly*) : Yes, Miss.

ELIZABETH : And now slip downstairs and see  
whether the study door is shut.

WILSON : Yes, Miss.

[WILSON goes out, leaving the door open. ELIZA-  
BETH picks up FLUSH, and stands with him under  
her arm, and looks round the room with an inde-  
scribable expression on her face. WILSON re-enters.

WILSON (*in a whisper*) : The door's shut—and  
all's quiet.

ELIZABETH : Very well.

[She passes out, and WILSON follows, closing the  
door softly after her.

For a moment the room stands empty. Then the  
Scene slowly closes.

## SCENE II

*The curtain rises on the still empty room. An hour or two has elapsed. The sky, seen through the window, is full of colour from the after-glow. A pause. ARABEL enters.*

ARABEL (*on entering*) : Ba dear, I want—— (*She realises the room's emptiness and stares bewildered around her. Her eyes light on the letters Elizabeth has left. Leaving the door open, she goes to the table and looks at them. She picks up a letter, and whispers, visibly agitated*) For me. . . . What can it mean . . . ? (*She tears open the letter, and reads it with little gasping exclamations*) Oh . . . ! No, no . . . ! Married . . . ! No . . . ! Oh . . . Oh . . . ! (*She looks up from the letter, her face transformed with terror and excitement ; then suddenly sits back on the sofa and goes into shrieks and peals of hysterical laughter. The noise is appalling.*)

[*After a moment there are voices and steps outside, and GEORGE, CHARLES, and OCTAVIUS enter almost simultaneously. GEORGE is dressed for dinner ; but the other two have not yet finished their toilet.*

GEORGE : Arabel !

CHARLES : For God's sake !

GEORGE : Arabel ! What on earth——

OCTAVIUS : High-strikes ! B-by Jove !

[ARABEL *laughs on.*

GEORGE (*taking one of her hands and slapping it*) : Stop that, Arabel ! Stop it at once !

ARABEL (*half gasping, half shrieking*) : Married—gone—married—gone—— (*She goes into another wild peal of laughter.*)

GEORGE : Be quiet ! (*Slaps her hand again.*) Fetch some water, someone . . .

OCTAVIUS : Eau-de-Cologne . . .

[ALFRED, SEPTIMUS, and HENRY, two of them dressed, the other without coat and collar, enter hurriedly.]

ALFRED : What's the matter ?

HENRY : Is Ba ill ? Arabel !

ARABEL (*gaspingly*) : She's married—she's gone—married—gone . . .

[HENRIETTA enters in her cloak and bonnet. She stands for a moment, wide-eyed, taking in the scene.]

Married and gone—Married and gone. . . .  
(*She moans and sobs.*)

[*Realisation begins to dawn on the brothers.*]

CHARLES : What does she mean ? Where's Ba ?

SEPTIMUS : Married and gone—she's mad !

GEORGE (*taking ARABEL by the shoulder*) : Arabel—what do you mean ?

OCTAVIUS : Married . . . !

[HENRIETTA suddenly pushes them aside, seizes ARABEL by the shoulders and vigorously shakes her.]

HENRIETTA : Arabel ! Arabel ! Pull yourself together at once ! . . . Where's Ba ? . . . Answer me ! . . . Where's Ba ?

ARABEL (*gaspingly*) : She—she's m-m-married Mr. Robert Browning. . . .

HENRIETTA (*in a whisper*) : Married . . .

[*Consternation among the brothers and amazed exclamations :— “ Married ! ”—“ Married ! ”—“ It can't be true ! ”—“ Robert Browning ! ”—“ Good God ! ” . . .*]

HENRIETTA (*to ARABEL, who is still sobbing*) : Where is she ?

ARABEL : She—she's gone. . . . Those letters—She's written to—to all of us. . . . She—she's gone. . . .

[OCTAVIUS has pounced on the letters.]

OCTAVIUS : F-for you. (*Hands a letter to HENRIETTA.*)

[*She tears it open and reads.*

George—Henry—Alfred—Septimus—Charles.

[*He hands them each a letter which is quickly torn open and read with muttered exclamations :—" Good God ! " — " Impossible ! " — " Married ! " — " A week ago——"*

GEORGE : Yes, she was married last Saturday.

OCTAVIUS (*holding up a letter*) : And this letter is for P-papa.

[*A frightened silence falls on them. Only HENRIETTA looks before her with an inscrutable smile on her face.*

ARABEL (*in a shuddering whisper*) : P-P-papa . . .

SEPTIMUS : Is he in ?

GEORGE : Dressing for dinner.

OCTAVIUS : What's to be d-done ?

HENRY : Someone must give him Ba's letter.

HENRIETTA (*in a clear voice*) : Let me. I should love to.

ARABEL (*in a terrified whisper*) : Oh, hush—hush . . .

[*She points tremblingly to the door. They all hold their breath. In the pause one hears the sound of approaching footsteps. Then BARRETT, in evening dress, appears on the threshold. He looks at his assembled family in stern amazement. No one stirs.*

BARRETT : What is the meaning of this ?

[*No one stirs or replies.*

Who was making that hideous noise just now ?

[*No one stirs or replies.*

Why are you gentlemen half-dressed ?

[*No one stirs or replies. A pause. Then sharply*

Where is Elizabeth ?

[*A silence. He passes into the room. With a stifled*



*cry, ARABEL rises and clings on to HENRIETTA's arm.*

Do you hear me? . . . (To HENRIETTA) Where is your sister?

HENRIETTA (*freeing herself from ARABEL and picking up the letter*) : She left you this letter.

BARRETT (*without touching it, in a low voice, his face becoming a mask*) : Left me. . . . What do you mean?

HENRIETTA : She left letters for all of us. This is yours.

[*His eyes fixed on her face, he slowly takes the letter from her. He is about to open it when she suddenly seizes his arm.*

(*Passionately, entreatingly*) : You must forgive her, Papa—you must forgive her—not for her sake—but for yours ! I thought I hated you, but I don't. I pity you—I pity you. . . . And if you've any pity for yourself—forgive her. . . .

[*He looks at her steadily for a moment ; then puts her away from him. He opens and reads the letter. Nothing but his quickened breathing betrays the fury of emotions seething in him. His face, when at last he raises it from the letter, is a white mask. He stands motionless staring before him and mechanically folding and refolding the letter. He turns and walks to the window, and his gait somehow gives the impression that he is blind. He throws open the window and stands in front of it with his back to the room and his hands clasped behind him grasping the letter. The movement of his shoulders shows that he is breathing quickly and heavily. No one stirs.*

BARRETT (*half to himself, turning from the window*) : Yes—yes. . . . Her dog. . . . (*A smile of indescribable ugliness flickers across his face.*) Yes—I'll have her dog. . . . Octavius.

OCTAVIUS : Sir ?

BARRETT : Her dog must be destroyed. At once.

HENRIETTA : But——

BARRETT (*slightly raising his voice*) : You will take it to the vet—to-night. . . . You understand me ? . . . To-night. (*A pause.*) You understand me ?

OCTAVIUS (*desperately*) : I really d-don't see what the p-poor little beast has d-done to——

BARRETT (*ominously*) : You understand me ?

HENRIETTA (*vainly trying to control the triumph in her voice*) : In her letter to me Ba writes that she has taken Flush with her. . . .

[*A silence. BARRETT stands perfectly still, staring straight before him and mechanically tearing ELIZABETH'S letter into little pieces, which drop to his feet.*]

#### THE END

I think Mr Byrd must have read the *Alcina* & also read it to his beloved Kamla. So they follow the same lines.

W. H. W.

قافے دایچے چلے گئے ہیں عجب دیکھ رہے ہیں  
لیا سہ نہ ہو کسی نے مجھے - میرا رشتہ بدلوا لیا ہے

148

How can I see you Elizabeth,  
Ye, are now surely free;

I can not make up unto  
Ye, have deceived me; <sup>136</sup>

Elizabeth, Elizabeth, Elizabeth,  
Can I blame you, in May.

148

# THE IMPROPER DUCHESS

814.36

ES3EQ2

Emerson:

Enayo

acc 7136.

MI L 567

8/67

81B67

49A72 31 4/7

17<sup>10</sup> 2 950F

18 9/54 1163

28.11.55 1427

21 12/55 1096

22 8/58 1361

7 4/57 1550

3.5.57 1174F

11 1/6 1271366

20 1/66 1271366



JAMES B. FAGAN  
THE IMPROPER DUCHESS

A MODERN COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

"Notice"  
This book seems more  
as the whole not as interesting  
than books and making excellent  
keeping this near at hand  
my character in view, request  
in have affairs to take active part

*Copyright in U.S.A 1931 by James Bernard Fagan*  
*All rights reserved*

*To*

The First Lady

of the Land—

The Statue of Liberty

" *The Improper Duchess* " was produced under the management of MAURICE BROWNE at the Empire Theatre, Southampton, on January 12th, 1931, and opened on January 22nd at the Globe Theatre, London.

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*Characters in order of their appearance*

Count Seidel	FRANK COCHRANE
Milton Lee	GRANVILLE FERRIER
Captain Olven	CLAUDE WHINNEY
Baron Kamp	EUGENE LEAHY
J. Montgomery Curtis	GEORGE F. IDE
Miss Cutting	RUTH PETERSON
Augustus X (King of Poldavia)	FRANK CELLIER
Erasmus	JAMES SOLOMON
Myrom B. Garcia	ANDREA MALANDRINO
Willis Macabe	HARRY J. CLIFFORD
H.H. The Duchess of Tann	YVONNE ARNAUD
Baroness Kamp	ANNIE ESMOND
Miss Mamie Hatch	JULIE SUEDO
Senator Bernard J. Corcoran	HARTLEY POWER
Rev. Adam B. Mac- adam	JOHN LAURIE
Gunning	WINIFRED OUGHTON

---

The Play produced and the Settings designed by  
the Author



# PERSONS OF THE PLAY

AUGUSTUS X, *King of Poldavia*

BARON KAMP

COUNT SEIDEL

CAPTAIN OLVEN

SENATOR BERNARD J. CORCORAN

REV. ADAM B. MACADAM

MILTON LEE

J. MONTGOMERY CURTIS

MYROM B. GARCIA

WILLIS MACABE

ERASMUS

H.H. THE DUCHESS OF TANN

BARONESS KAMP

MISS MAMIE HATCH

MISS CUTTING

GUNNING

*The Place* : Washington, D.C., U.S.A.

*The Period* : During the next Presidency

*The Action* : Covers twenty-six hours

## SCENES

### ACT I

Library at the Poldavian Embassy

### ACT II

The Duchess's Room at the Paradise Hotel

### ACT III

Same as Act I

814.36

ES3EQ2

Emerson:

Enayo

acc 7136.

111567

8/67 31367

49A72 31 4/7

17<sup>10</sup> 2 950F

18<sup>9</sup>/54 1163

28.11.55 1427

21<sup>12</sup>/55 1096

22<sup>8</sup>/58 1361

74/57 1550

3.5.57 1174F

21/6 1221366

26/66 1221366

## ACT I

SCENE : *The Poldavian Embassy in Washington. The Ambassador's study. Three lofty French windows in the back wall which runs obliquely away from the audience R. to L. Outside, a terrace and glimpses of white houses through trees. Upstage in the wall R. a small door which leads through to the Chancelry. Upstage in the wall L. large double doors leading through a reception room to the other apartments. Below the doors a fireplace above which hangs a large portrait of a stout youngish man, in uniform. Other pictures and photos, groups of men, statesmen, and a few imposing ladies. At right angles to it and above the fireplace a large sofa. In front of centre window a large desk with chair on its left, a long stool on its right, and a round stool at the end next footlights, R. a round table.*

*A bright morning in late spring.*

*At the round table R., front, four men are seated. An empty chair faces the audience, on the right of this sits MILTON LEE, President of the International Oil Co., a long lean man any age over fifty. When he speaks, which is seldom, his voice is a hard slow nasal drawl and his face never moves a muscle. On his right sits J. MONTGOMERY CURTIS, first Vice-President of I.O.C., a big, florid, fleshy, well-groomed, well-dressed, spectacled product of American business and American culture. He does the talking. Left of the empty chair sits the Poldavian Ambassador, BARON KAMP, distinguished but pompous, about forty-five, and risen from the chair on his left COUNT SEIDEL is bending over the Ambassador's chair and reading the bulky document that lies before them—a counterpart of which MONTGOMERY CURTIS is reading, while LEE sits giving an imitation of the Sphinx chewing the end of a perfect cigar. The COUNT is an elderly man, looks something of a roué, quick, humorous, and in the position of first secretary carries the brains of the establishment. The table is covered with documents, large and small. A*

little behind them on the left a wheeled stand with a sheaf of maps, and an attaché standing by to turn them and take notes. CAPTAIN OLVEN, a fat, pleasant young man, is naval attaché, but the Poldavian Navy consisting of six river gunboats, his work is commercial.

There is a longish pause after the curtain rises, while the three men read, SEIDEL bending forward occasionally to note with a marginal finger certain passages for his chief.

SEIDEL (raising his eyes) : Another cigar, Mr. Lee ? (He pushes the box towards him, and resumes reading.)

[After a pause LEE takes the stump from his mouth, puts it in the ash-tray deliberately, slowly evolves a cigar from the silver and tissue wrappings, bites the end and turning slowly ejects it. As he puts the cigar in his mouth OLVEN is beside him with a lighted match which he ignores, taking a lighter from his pocket. When his cigar is alight, he blows a long puff and drawls without turning.

LEE : Always burn oil.

OLVEN (smiling) : In Poldavia lighters are illegal—we have a match tax.

[He retires.

MONTGOMERY CURTIS turns the last page, the Ambassador follows suit a few moments later. When CURTIS finishes reading he sits drumming the fingers of one hand, while with a pencil in the other he marks the notes he has made on a sheet of paper.

KAMP (as he finishes reading) : Yes—yes——

CURTIS : Now, Mr. Ambassador—just one point with regard to Option A—marked blue on the map.

[OLVEN points to it ; all look at the map except LEE.

By the terms of the concession, the International



Oil Co. is granted a seven years' option on the blue territory A at the specified figure. It will take three years, according to the reports of our engineers, before the boring of the oil-bearing tracts in the main concession is completed. We may never want to take up Option A. Besides, it hasn't been prospected—not properly. We don't know yet that there's enough oil there to make it pay.

SEIDEL : Oil ! (*Laughing*) We know *now* that the whole of the district on that map is probably the richest oil-bearing country in Europe.

CURTIS : Maybe yes. We know there's oil on the other side—that green section——

KAMP : That is the royal hunting forest, Mr. Curtis.

CURTIS : Yes, I know, but for an option on that we could pay a very big price.

SEIDEL : I shouldn't like to suggest it to his Majesty—I might have my head chopped off. (*Laughing.*)

CURTIS : No one can sit on oil—it's bursting to come up and serve humanity.

KAMP (*glancing at the clock*) : I am afraid his Majesty is very late, gentlemen.

CURTIS : Well, well, it's pleasant to find that royalty is only human.

LEE : I thought punctuality was the politeness of kings.

SEIDEL : His Majesty has been flying for three weeks. That has probably disturbed his sense of time.

[LEE *grunts*.

CURTIS : That notion of flying the tour was certainly fine. Whose idea was that ?

KAMP : The Duchess of Tann's.

CURTIS : We had the trip all lined up on the railroads, but of course this made us a back number.

SEIDEL : An hour after they landed the Duchess said to me : “ We could not be seen by the whole of America unless we could fly—we must travel by air.”

LEE : Bully for her !

SEIDEL : In twenty-four hours the whole of the arrangements were altered, and his Majesty, taking only two equerries, the Duchess, her lady-in-waiting, and maid, started on what must certainly be the most remarkable royal progress on record. Boston, Buffalo, Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, San Francisco, Hollywood, Kansas City, New Orleans, Pittsburg, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Washington ! It was an inspiration—and the newspapers red hot all the time ! (*Chuckling.*)

LEE : I'll say it was the greatest advertising stunt in my time—put Poldavia on the map, I guess it may even put the Poldavian Loan on the market.

SEIDEL (*sharply*) : May ?

KAMP : What do you mean, Mr. Lee, by “ may even ” ?

SEIDEL : The flotation of the Poldavian Loan is one of the conditions of the concession. The two instruments are due for signature to-morrow—simultaneously.

CURTIS : Yes, yes, yes, that will be all right—the bankers have agreed. There are one or two minor points——

[*Loud cheering is heard down the street, accompanied by hand-clapping and a chorus of Klaxon horns.*]

KAMP (*relieved*) : Ah ! His Majesty at last. (*He rises.*)

[OLVEN has also risen and stepped through the open window on to the terrace.

OLVEN : It's not his Majesty, sir.

KAMP : Oh !

OLVEN : No, sir, it's the Alcazar Theatre in the next block. Raymond Trix, Personal Stellar appearance of, at the matinée of his new epic film *Just a Man* !

[More frenzied cheers and Klaxons ; as they subside OLVEN comes in, saying in an awed sotto voce :

Mr. Trix is now entering the vestibule !

LEE's repressed grin now bursts into laughter in which first SEIDEL and then KAMP join. CURTIS wears a sour smile.

CURTIS : Painful lack of the sense of proportion.

KAMP : I had forgotten, Mr. Lee, you manufacture your own kings in America now. (*Sitting.*)

LEE : Sure—and can them for export.

SEIDEL (*chuckling*) : Good—very good ! Now, Mr. Curtis, these minor points in connection with the Poldavian National Loan ?

CURTIS : Yes. (*Taking up a small brochure*) Just read through that first page and see if anything strikes you. (*He hands it to SEIDEL and takes up another copy himself.*)

[*There is a knock at the door R.*

OLVEN : Come in. (*Going toward the door.*)

[MISS CUTTING, a pert, pretty blonde stenographer comes in and meets OLVEN half way. She says something to him which the audience do not hear.

OLVEN (*firmly*) : He can't—the Ambassador is busy.

MISS CUTTING : It's the fourth time he's phoned.

OLVEN : Tell him he must give a message.

MISS CUTTING : I've *told* him that—he says it's *impossible*. (*Her voice reaches the high C of despair on the two words.*)

KAMP : What is the matter ? (*Looking round lazily.*)

OLVEN (*coming down*) : It's Mr. Garcia, the proprietor of the Paradise Hotel. He wants to speak to you personally, sir.

KAMP : No, no, no, I am too busy—he must give a message.

[OLVEN *turns to* MISS CUTTING, *who goes out with a despairing shrug.*

KAMP : He is so excited that his Majesty stays at his hotel—I think he has a little lost his balance.

OLVEN : Temperamental at the best of times, sir.

CURTIS (*as SEIDEL looks up*) : Well ?

SEIDEL : No.

CURTIS : Just listen. The proposal is to issue Poldavian National Bonds to the amount of two hundred million dollars on Wall Street, about the middle of October, bearing interest at six per cent.—(*He breaks off, then resumes, reading quickly*) “General Purposes of the loan : It is proposed to modernise and extend the present railroad system of the country, adding nearly one-third to its mileage. New roads are badly needed. Works projected on the two principal rivers will give the country a supply of cheap electricity. (*With emphasis*) And *lastly*, in the vital interest of security, it is understood that a sum not exceeding fifty per cent. of the loan, is to be devoted to the military establishment.” Mr. Ambassador—that “*lastly*” must come right out.

KAMP (*excitedly*) : No, no, no, that is not possible.

SEIDEL : It is for the army that we *need* the loan.

LEE : You won't get it for the army.



SEIDEL : The portion of the loan for the home market is called " The Security Loan." Without that it would fall flat. Security is life to us.

CURTIS : No doubt. But you have got to realise the curious mentality of the great peace-loving American people. They will make you all the war munitions you like to pay for with your own money, but they won't lend you a cent of their money to spend on fighting—no, sir, that's crime against humanity.

LEE : Wall Street is the palace of peace—it don't stand for anything with guns in it.

SEIDEL : What are we to do—go to Chicago ?

CURTIS : You can do anything you like in this country so you don't get it talked about—and I guess it's the same in yours.

KAMP : In all countries.

CURTIS : Put one word of war in your prospectus and every parson, pacifist, and bootlegger in the States will be after you. No, talk of education, national health schemes, police even, and you'll get all you want. You can camouflage its destination afterwards.

LEE : You can always eat your cake and have it—if you know how.

[ERASMUS *appears at the double doors L.*

ERASMUS : His Majesty is just arriving, your Excellency.

[KAMP *and* SEIDEL *rise hurriedly.*

KAMP : Pray excuse me, gentlemen—we shall be with you again in a moment.

[*They go out L.*

CURTIS *risés and strolls across to the fireplace. looking at the portrait which hangs over it.*

CURTIS : Who painted that portrait of his Majesty ?

OLVEN : Maincz, our great portrait painter. His Majesty was fatter then.

CURTIS : So I observe.

[*A knock on the door R. Miss CUTTING entering :*

Miss CUTTING : Mr. Garcia on the phone again—I shall go plumb crazy—will you speak to him—please ?

OLVEN : Very well. (*To the others*) Forgive me a moment.

[*He goes out with her.*

CURTIS (*as he lights a cigarette*) : His Majesty will be fatter again, when he gets all that's coming to him from this deal.

LEE : Sure—if his head don't get too fat, and start him fighting somebody.

CURTIS : Don't worry, the Duchess will sit on all that kind of bunk.

LEE : I'll be glad to meet this dame.

CURTIS : I had a good many talks with her when I was over there in January. She certainly bosses the King and her husband—of course over there everyone knows she is his Majesty's *chère amie*.

LEE : His——? Oh, you mean his “ cutie ”—sure I knew that all right. Who was she anyhow ?

CURTIS : A celebrated comic opera *divette*, Illyona Ferencz. After his queen died three years ago, “ Toutou ” married the lady to his Chancellor—in the interests of morality.

LEE (*chuckling*) : And the husband ain't jealous ?

CURTIS (*shaking his head*) : Not that kind of man. His Highness the Duke of Tann belongs to one of the oldest families in Poldavia—constitutionally indifferent to women. (*Throws his cigarette into the fireplace and comes towards the table*) A wise-cracker over there described the marriage as “ an alliance defensive and offensive.”

[LEE chuckles.

Anyhow we've got to keep right with her. She's the Poldavian Pompadour.

LEE : Say, son, your education sure makes my brain tired—I don't get these French words.

CURTIS (*laughing*) : Well, Pompadour was a swell vamp——

LEE : Shutt !!

[*The double doors L. open. The KING of Poldavia enters with BARON KAMP, COUNT SEIDEL follows. The KING, a youngish man, about thirty-five, wears a light grey tweed lounge suit and carries his right arm slung in a black silk handkerchief. He is decidedly inclined to flesh, but bronzed and pleasant-looking, with an easy smile which has made him popular. He speaks English fairly well, but with a full deep-toned foreign accent. He laughs a lot, a rather hollow laugh on one note.*

KAMP : Your Majesty, let me present to you Mr. Milton Lee, President of the International Oil Co.

KING : I have long time looked forward to making your acquaintance, Mr. Lee.

LEE : Glad to meet your Majesty.

KAMP : Mr. Montgomery Curtis you have met.

KING : Delighted to meet you again, Mr. Curtis.

CURTIS : Very pleased to see your Majesty looking so well.

KING : I trust, gentlemen, we are to have the pleasure of meeting more often in the future. You must come to Poldavia, Mr. Lee.

LEE : Well, I guess I'm a home bird, your Majesty, but I might. (*Suddenly pointing to his arm*) Say, have you been in a smash up?

KING : Ho ! ho ! ho ! ho ! ho ! no—no—no—I only suffer a little from the enthusiasm of your welcome. In three weeks I have been violently

shaken by thousands of American hands—with the help of massage I stood it as far as Kansas City, but after that, I have to defend myself. (*Indicating the sling*) The Mayor of Kansas ! Ho ! ho ! ho ! What a grip !—I thought he had drawn blood. (*Taking his arm from the sling*) But it is not very bad—a precaution—it will give me great pleasure to shake you by the hand. (*He shakes hands with LEE.*)

LEE : I'm being very careful, your Majesty.

[*They both laugh.*]

KING : Well, gentlemen, we have business and I am very late.

[*SEIDEL draws back the centre chair for the KING, who sits.*]

LEE (*sitting*) : You certainly are, and I guess the business has gotten through without you.

[*The others are seated.*]

KING : That is how I like it. At home, I say to my Chancellor, "Do not bother me with business, get it done and then tell it to me if you must." Ho ! ho ! ho ! I do not hold with this modern working-man-king idea. Most of my royal cousins—those that are left—they are working from morning till night—business men. It is all wrong.

KAMP : Your Majesty is too modest.

[*OLVEN returns R.*]

KING : No, no, the business of a king is to entertain himself, and any of his subjects who are entertaining. Baron, could I have a little something to eat ?

KAMP : Of course, your Majesty.

[*OLVEN comes forward.*]

KING : Some beer and three or four sandwiches.

OLVEN (*going*) : Yes, your Majesty.

KING : Sandwiches—not American sandwiches.



OLVEN : I know, your Majesty.

*[Going out L.]*

KING : Your skyscrapers give me a pain in the neck and your sandwiches give me a pain in the jaw. Ha ! ha ! ha !

CURTIS : You don't like our American food ?

KING : Oh yes. I am sure it would be very good, if you would give us time to eat it. (*Throwing out his arms*) Oh, the rush of your life !—where are you going to ?—and what will it be when you get there ?

LEE : Well—we're going to Poldavia, and I guess it'll be a pretty smart place when we're through with it.

KING (*waving his fingers*) : Ah yes ! tell me of that—the business ? It is all settled ?

SEIDEL : Everything should be ready for signature to-morrow, your Majesty—if a few minor points—

CURTIS : Yes, could we not have those now, for his Majesty's consideration—

KING : No, no, no business—the Duchess of Tann will attend to it, she is here to represent her husband, my Chancellor. She has a head for business. Let us go over there, I do not like this table—it is like a cabinet meeting.

*[He rises and goes to the sofa L. The others are following.]*

Sit here, Mr. Lee. Be seated, gentlemen. Ah !

*[As he stretches himself in the corner of the couch, LEE sits on his right. SEIDEL places a chair for KAMP R. of couch and remains standing. CURTIS sits on stool in front of fireplace.]*

And so it is all settled.

LEE : All O.K.

KING : Good, good. My country has always been very poor and very wild. Now they tell

me it will be all different. Roads, railways, everywhere; electric light blazing, big buildings, work for everybody, a big army, and money all round—ha! ha! ha!—a little America! Well, so long as you do not spoil my hunting.

*[A few moments earlier OLVEN returned with ERASMUS, the coloured butler, bearing a tankard of beer and a small plate of sandwiches on a salver. These he puts on the little table L. of couch and bends forward, placing them in front of the KING as the latter finishes speaking.]*

Ah!—What a magnificent old negro! (*He pats him on the back as though he were a dog.*) You are a patriarch, eh?

ERASMUS : Yessuh—your Majesty. I is de oldest servant at de Embassy.

KING : What is your name?

ERASMUS : Erasmus, your Majesty.

KING : A very wise name—thank you, Erasmus.

*[ERASMUS bows, smiling, and goes out; the KING takes the tankard.]*

Gentlemen, I drink to our success, as we say in Poldavia. (*Raising the tankard*) *Svod naya ukesnirov!*

*[He drinks nearly the whole tankard in a few gulps.]*  
Good! (*Smacking his lips. Then swallows a sandwich at one mouthful*) Very good!

KAMP (*suddenly*) : Forgive me, gentlemen—a drink—a cocktail?

CURTIS } (*Together*) (*shaking his head*) : Thank you.  
LEE } Never in the morning.

KING : After your other towns, Mr. Lee, Washington impresses me as very quiet—(*Waving his arm*)—an atmosphere of—

LEE : Sure, Washington ain't a town, it's a high-hat shop. (*Chuckling.*)

KING : At other places we are besieged! But

here—half a dozen journalists at the aerodrome where we land, a few more at the hotel—

KAMP : Your Majesty's arrival was planned for this morning.

KING : That is so. Ho ! ho ! ho ! ho ! the Duchess was not so fortunate—two gentlemen came right into her bedroom last night. (*He roars with laughter.*)

LEE : Gettin' fresh !

KING : Ho ! ho ! ho ! ho ! but it was all right—they apologise—

CURTIS : I'll say they should.

KING : Now this morning I *walk* here with my *aide de camp*—so pleasant—European !

CURTIS : Your Majesty mustn't take that for lack of interest—

KING : Oh ! but I like it !

CURTIS : We have here all the time the representatives of many sovereigns, and of course our president who is a sort of king—

LEE : I'll say he is. (*Chuckling.*)

KING : Ah yes, I pay my respects to him at the White House this afternoon—(*to KAMP*) at what o'clock, Baron ?

KAMP : At five, your Majesty.

[*The KING nods and drinks the rest of his beer.*]

And of course the President does us the honour to lunch here to-morrow.

CURTIS : Certainly a brilliant conclusion to your Majesty's remarkably successful visit. The whole thing has built up to a superlative climax—

LEE (*rising*) : And we hope Wall Street will be duly impressed.

CURTIS (*looking at his watch*) : If your Majesty will excuse us—we have another important conference before lunch—

KING (*rising*) : Please, gentlemen, do not stand on ceremony.

[CURTIS and the others rise, CURTIS with a pained look at LEE.

KAMP : You are lunching here at one, gentlemen——

LEE : Sure.

CURTIS : And his Majesty has not forgotten he dines with us to-night at the Excelsior——

KING : No, no, I do not forget—they told me—“a stag party with the Oil Kings.” Ho ! ho ! ho !

LEE : We'll sure give you time to eat that one—and drink it, oh boy !

[OLVEN opens the doors, the KING accompanies LEE, CURTIS follows with KAMP, SEIDEL last.

KING (*as he goes up*) : You have a President of the U.S.A., Mr. Lee—and you are President of the I.O.C., and in other towns I meet all the presidents of the rest of the alphabet. Why do you do that ?

LEE : I guess it's democracy.

KING : In Poldavia I am the King—if I had to meet the Emperor of boot-factory, I should not know whether to laugh or . . .

[*The rest of his remark is lost, only his laugh is heard as CURTIS and KAMP follow them out, and SEIDEL is following them.*

MISS CUTTING knocks R. and enters without waiting.

MISS CUTTING (*very perturbed*) : Mr. Garcia is waiting in the Chancelry ; he says if he don't see the Ambassador at once he'll wash his hands or something—he's fair crazy—say, what am I to do with him ?

OLVEN (*to SEIDEL*) : He phoned again just now—he sounded crazy. I told him if he couldn't give a message, he'd have to bring it.



MISS CUTTING : He's brought a man with him—toughish sort of guy in a blue suit.

SEIDEL : I'd better see him. Bring them in.

[OLVEN and MISS CUTTING go out.]

SEIDEL closes the doors L., goes to the desk, lights a cigarette, and sits L. of desk. A few moments later, OLVEN brings on GARCIA and WILLIS MACABE. GARCIA is a middle-aged, stoutish yellow-faced Italian American with black waxed moustache and hair going bald. He is over-smartly dressed in black morning coat, striped trousers, and white spats. He carries a bowler in one hand and mops his head with a coloured silk handkerchief with the other. The second man is a long lean, lantern-jawed Irish American in a blue serge suit. He rarely ceases chewing gum.

SEIDEL : 'Morning, Mr. Garcia.

GARCIA : Good morning, Count. This is my hotel detective—Mr. Macabe. (*Perturbed and almost breathless.*)

MACABE : Willis Macabe.

GARCIA : He coma with me because it is—very urgent——

SEIDEL (*nodding*) : How d'ye do ?

MACABE : Pleastameetya. (*With a nod.*)

SEIDEL : Well, Mr. Garcia, what can we do for you ?

GARCIA : Count, I musta see the Ambassador.

SEIDEL : The Ambassador is with his Majesty. Anything you want to tell him—you can tell me. We have no secrets.

GARCIA (*wildly*) : I do not thinka only of myself—but if a word of this gets in the papers—I am a ruined man. I coulda not sell my hotel—no, nobody buy it.

SEIDEL : What on earth are you talking about ?

GARCIA : I tell it you something—if we are alone. (*He glances over his shoulder.*)

SEIDEL : Olven, do you mind ? Sit down.

[OLVEN *goes out R.*

GARCIA *sits R. of desk.* MACABE *at table R.*

GARCIA (*jumping up*) : What is out there—a balcony ? (*Points to open window.*)

SEIDEL : A terrace.

GARCIA : Sama thing—Macabe—shuta that window. (*To SEIDEL*) That is how it all happen.

[MACABE *shuts the window. They sit.*

SEIDEL : What happened—please explain.

GARCIA : When I builda the Paradise Hotel, twenty-five years ago, I say to myself “ Here in Washington the Americans they lika the European plan.” So I builda him with one balcony all along the front second floor—one balcony all along fourth floor, lika you see Paris, Vienna, Monte Carlo—beautiful !

SEIDEL (*nettled*) : Yes, but what has the history of your hotel——

GARCIA : In a minute—in a minute. Macabe, you tella him how it begin.

MACABE : Well, I guess it was about half-past twelve last night, I was having a walk round, as usual, just to see that folks was staying put—proper, in their own rooms, an’ the like. I come down on the second floor, an’ I see a bell hop outside one of the doors of the Royal suite, an’ the King’s aide-de-camp—Colonel—Colonel——

SEIDEL : Menken.

MACABE : Sure, that’s him—giving it the boy good an’ hard. I enquire the trouble. He tells me two gentlemen had just walked along the balcony and come right into the Duchess’s bedroom, when Her Highness was goin’ to bed, or in bed—I misremember—anyway the Colonel was in a stew and his Majesty was all het up about it an’ what was I going to do ?

SEIDEL : But how dare you permit such a thing to happen—— !

GARCIA (*waving his arms*) : That damn balcony—but you wait—you don't know the half of it !

MACABE : Well, I said it was a mistake and they'd sure apologise—he said they had—an' I told him I'd enquire into it, and take steps it couldn't happen again—I gave him all the dope. An' he went in an' shut the door an' I thought that was all there was to it.

GARCIA : And then it begin on me ! I am just going to sleep. Brrrr ! the telephone. Senator Corcoran—he stay in the hotel—he coma nearly three weeks ago—he say he wanta see me at once. I say I am in bed, he say he don'ta give a damn where I am—at once. I jump out of bed, I puta on my silk robe, I go down to his rooms. There is another man with him, a clergyman. They say a very serious thing have happen—I must take action at once. He say Washington by night—very beautiful—they have just walk along the balcony to look at the view. The windows of the room next but two are wide open. They looka in, they go in. There is a lady in the bed, sitting up and laughing and clapping her hands. And a gentleman in his pyjamas dancing in front of a big mirror. The lady is the Duchess of Tann. The gentleman is his Majesty the King of Poldavia——

SEIDEL (*springing up*) : But how dare you let rooms on that floor——

GARCIA : I know ! I know !—(*holding up his hands.*)

SEIDEL : Your contract was the whole floor for his Majesty and suite——

GARCIA : It is not all my fault—I explain——

SEIDEL : I must get the Ambassador. (*Going.*)

GARCIA : That is what I ask since ten o'clock !

[SEIDEL *hurries out* L.]

Dio mio ! (*Mopping his brow*) I could weep—I do all they ask—I spenda six thousand dollars to make the rooms beautiful—and he shout me “How dare you let rooms.”

MACABE : Say Chief, that balcony stunt’s all wrong—’tain’t modern—’tain’t moral—seein’ folks is how they is.

GARCIA : I know—if I geta out of this I rebuild the hotel—I make every room a safe deposit.

MACABE : You oughta kinda guessed you were takin’ risks lettin’ those rooms to that Senator guy. He’s a tough joint—Colorado—always shootin’ some kinda stunt.

GARCIA : How could I guess ? He is a senator—sure he is tough, but everybody lika him. He come to me last Friday fortnight—I giva him the little suite right at the end—he say he wanta quiet.

MACABE : You bet he did.

GARCIA : It is here they are to blame. When they change their plans to go by aeroplane they senda half their people back home. Then a secretary here he writa me, he say he know they taka the whole floor, but many rooms would be empty, could I make a reduction ? (*Rising, looks at his watch, then begins to wind it*) Dio ! What is the time ?

MACABE (*glancing at wrist-watch*) : Half after eleven.

GARCIA : We have half an hour !—I forget to winda my watch last night. I wonder I am alive——

MACABE : Guess I’m wonderin’ too——

GARCIA : What ?

MACABE : Wonderin’ was this a plant—or was it just an accident ?

GARCIA : What !—you think—— ?

MACABE : Think nix—I’m just figurin’ it out.



[GARCIA stares at him, he figures and chews.  
SEIDEL returning with KAMP.

SEIDEL : I have informed his Excellency briefly of what you told me—will you please go on ?

KAMP : This is a very serious matter, Mr. Garcia.

[Sitting on the sofa, GARCIA standing on his right.  
SEIDEL in front of fireplace.

GARCIA : Serious ! I thinka your Excellency and the Count have no idea how serious it is—we have exactly half an hour.

SEIDEL : Half an hour ? What do you mean ?

GARCIA : Half an hour before we puta them out. .

KAMP : Put them out ?

SEIDEL : Who ?

GARCIA : Puta them out of the hotel—his Majesty and the Duchess of Tann.

KAMP (*rising*) : Good God, man, do you know what you're saying ?

GARCIA (*wildly*) : Your Excellency, *I* do not say nothing. It is the law that say it. It is Senator Corcoran—it is the Rev. Adam Macadam—

KAMP : A law to turn his Majesty the King of Poldavia out of your hotel—preposterous !

SEIDEL (*laying a hand on his arm*) : Wait, your Excellency—I fancy there is a law of some kind.

MACABE : Sure there's a law. Regulations relating to hotels, and public lodging-houses. Any man and woman not legally married found occupying a room in any hotel or public lodging-house shall be summarily ejected upon the facts being brought to the notice of the proprietor or manager. Failure to comply will involve the action of the police. The penalty shall be the padlocking of the premises for any period not exceeding one year as the Court may determine.

[KAMP puts his hands to his head and walks to the fireplace.]

GARCIA (*wildly*) : I am innocent and it all fall on me ! (*Goes towards window waving his arms.*)

SEIDEL : This law cannot apply to his Majesty's suite.

MACABE : The Duchess's rooms ain't in the suite—they're alongside. They ain't properly two rooms neither—archway and curtains between 'em. It is held in practice that a suite ain't a room for the purpose of the law. But this here's a border case, sure—an' Gawlmighty couldn't keep it out of court.

KAMP (*turning*) : What nonsense, sir ! As if it were a common police court case. His Majesty the King of Poldavia and her Highness the Duchess of Tann are . . . are placed above—er—consideration of this kind. Count Seidel, please, get on to the Attorney-General's department immediately, and ask for an appointment to——

SEIDEL (*holding up his hand*) : Your Excellency, may I suggest even that publicity must be avoided. We must try and handle this matter ourselves.

MACABE : An' you bet your life the Attorney-General'll be watchin' his step with a Senator an' a snoopy parson waitin' round the corner.

GARCIA : Your Excellency, we do nothing but talking, and I have pledga my word I throw them out bag and baggage at twelve noon to-day.

KAMP : Mr. Garcia ! I insist that you choose your words when you speak of his Majesty——

GARCIA (*wildly*) : I choosa my words ! I choosa my words !—lasta night I go on my knees—I weep, when Reverend Macadam he wanta me to throw them out at once.

SEIDEL : Why did you not inform us immediately ?

GARCIA : Because I thinka they changea their minds when they sleep on it. Then at ten o'clock to-day the Senator he senda for me—Reverend Macadam also there—the Senator he say “ Garcia, out at twelve or we inform the police—— ! ” (*To KAMP*) And I phone and phone and no one leta me speak to you and now they waita for me at the hotel—what do I tella them ? What do I do ?

KAMP : I—I won't take the responsibility. His Majesty must be informed——

SEIDEL : Unquestionably.

KAMP : Count, don't you think——

SEIDEL : Your Excellency, in the circumstances——

KAMP (*nodding*) : Yes, yes, I suppose so——

[*Goes out quickly L.*]

SEIDEL : This is the very devil !

MACABE : And then some !

SEIDEL : But what can they want ?

GARCIA : They wanta I throw them out——

MACABE : I get you—but I ain't found the clue yet.

GARCIA : You think they wanta something else—no—the Reverend he is very shocked all the time—he wanta the law. But the Senator he have a twinkle in his eye. (*He shrugs his shoulders.*)

[*KAMP returns with the KING who is shaking with laughter.*]

KING : My dear Baron—can you picture it—with my figure—in golden pyjamas—in front of the cheval glass—trying to dance the Black Bottom ! Ho ! ho ! ho ! ho ! ho ! Of course at first I am very angry—but I cannot think of it without laughing——

KAMP : But, your Majesty——

KING : Yes, yes, I know, the story must be kept quiet—but it was funny.

KAMP : It would appear that—er—quite unintentionally—your Majesty has violated an—er—an American law——

KING (*laughing*) : A law ! if they have a law against my dancing the Black Bottom, it is a good law, because I am rotten—— Ah, Garcia, so you have heard the story—but remember—— (*Lays his finger on his lips.*)

GARCIA : Yes, your Majesty. (*Does the same, bowing.*)

SEIDEL : The law which it is alleged your Majesty has violated is as follows : Any man and woman not legally married found occupying a room in any hotel must be put out immediately by the proprietor or manager. (*To MACABE*) That is correct ?

MACABE : Sure.

KING : What a funny law ! (*Laughing*) What is that—more prohibition ?

SEIDEL : Your Majesty, it is too serious to be funny. The two men who entered her Highness's room last night are Senator Corcoran and the Rev. Adam Macadam. At this moment they are waiting at the hotel for Mr. Garcia to let them know that your Majesty and her Highness have left the hotel for good.

KING : You are joking ?

GARCIA (*perspiring*) : It is no joke—I——

[MACABE *digs him in the ribs.*]

KING : Because I am in a room with Lonya we are put out of an hotel !—it is impossible !

SEIDEL : It is incredible, your Majesty, but here—— (*Shrugs.*)

KING : Who are these men ?

SEIDEL : Two American citizens, that is all that matters.

KING : But it is ridiculous—tell them to go to the devil.



SEIDEL : Unfortunately they would not go to the devil, but to the police.

GARCIA : And I losa——

[MACABE *shuts him up with a dig in the ribs.*

KAMP : I am profoundly distressed to have to trouble your Majesty with this—er—wretched business, but apparently——

SEIDEL : Not apparently, Excellency—these men are waiting to take action.

GARCIA : At twelve o'clock—what do I say, what do I do ?

KAMP : Er, yes, yes—we considered it imperative to consult your Majesty as to the procedure, er—what are we to do ?

KING (*angry*) : Do ! *Krashtovida !*—you got me in, get me out !

KAMP : Your Majesty may rely on me. Er—— (*With sudden inspiration*) Why not ? Your Majesty *has* left the hotel—her Highness, too, she will be here at any moment—you—er—simply do not return. The Embassy is small but a suite of three—er—four rooms can be arranged. The others remain at the hotel. The situation is saved.

KING : I am saved—if I run away ! Baron, I am ashamed of you.

SEIDEL : His Majesty is right. It would be a fatal admission. That may be just what they want, a story—a scandal, and the proof—his Majesty and her Highness have gone. It would simply put us in their hands.

KAMP : But we are in their hands !

SEIDEL : Not yet ! There is only one course, we must make them withdraw their complaint.

KING : That is right. Ruffians !

KAMP : A bribe ?

GARCIA (*shaking his head*) : The Senator very rich man. The other—— (*He shrugs his shoulders.*)

KAMP (*despairingly*) : Then what *do* we do ?

SEIDEL : For the moment we play for time.

GARCIA (*pulling out his watch*) : Time ! In ten minutes they send for the police. (*Tapping it.*)

[SEIDEL *goes to the phone on the desk.*

SEIDEL (*to the phone*) : Get the Paradise Hotel—Senator Corcoran's suite—Mr. Garcia to speak to him. Quick. (*Hangs up the phone and rises.*) Garcia, sit here.

[GARCIA *sits L. of desk.*

When he comes through, say this—I am now at the Embassy——

GARCIA (*shaking*) : I am now at the Embassy——

SEIDEL : With the Ambassador——

GARCIA : With the Ambassador——

SEIDEL : I am coming right back——

GARCIA : I am coming right back——

SEIDEL : To bring you full satisfaction.

GARCIA : To bring you full satisfaction.

[SEIDEL *comes down to back of sofa. GARCIA repeating quickly to himself.*

I am now at Ambassador, with full satisfaction, I am coming right back, to bring you the Embassy ! Ah !

[*With a cry of dismay, he puts his hands to his head. The phone rings. He takes the receiver, mopping his brow.*

Is that Senator Corcoran . . . Mr. Garcia speaking. . . . I am now at—the Poldavian Embassy—with the Ambassador—I am coming right back—to bring you full satisfaction. (*As he listens to the reply he winces.*) But Sen—— (*He hangs up.*)

SEIDEL : What did he say ?

GARCIA (*rising*) : He say if I don'ta come pretty damn quick I will be tramped to death by the police squad in the vestibule.

SEIDEL : Now, get back to them at once. You will say his Excellency would be distressed, if a law had been broken. But there has been some misunderstanding. Say if they will defer taking action until six o'clock, I will call on them at whatever time they wish, and explain the situation.

GARCIA : And is that the full satisfaction ?

SEIDEL : Say we are prepared to give full satisfaction if—deal in ifs. Use your native wit. Be a diplomatist for the day.

GARCIA (*nodding, pleased*) : Feed 'em some good big lies—yes, yes, I understand. Your Majesty—your Excellency.

[*Bows and goes to door R. MACABE after a couple of awkward nods following.*]

SEIDEL : And as soon as you've seen them, phone the result.

GARCIA : At once—I phone.

[*Goes out beyond MACABE.*]

KAMP (*with pompous irony*) : And may I ask, Count, what is the misunderstanding, and the situation you propose to explain ?

SEIDEL (*sitting limply R.*) : I haven't the slightest idea—as yet.

KING (*turns and stares at him*) : So—so ! (*He turns and stares at KAMP for several moments.*) And you, Baron ? What helpful suggestion have you ?

KAMP : Your Majesty—there are so many things we could do. I agree that we must do something—but that something—er—must achieve—er—what we want to do.

KING : So ! Now I know where I am—— If these two scoundrels were citizens of Poldavia I should not have to ask what to do—I should know ! (*Rising*) But here I must put myself in your hands—hands ! ho ! ho ! ho ! ho ! ho ! the flopping feelers of two antiquated jellyfishes !

(*He walks about in rising rage.*) Where is your backbone, Baron Kamp?—are you a spineless mummy that all you can do is to advise me to run away from a couple of peeping rascals—to let them insult me—me your sovereign!

KAMP : Your Majesty, I——

KING : How dare you send me to a place where such a thing could happen?

KAMP : The arrangements were in Count Seidel's hands, your Ma——

KING : Hands ! hands ! You *have* no hands ! Day after day I am shaking American hands and I know what hands are—they have grip. (*Shaking his finger at him*) And do not put blame on another, *you* are responsible.

KAMP (*bowing*) : I am proud to think so, your Maj——

KING : And you, Count Seidel, have you no brains in your mind? Could you not know—could you not foresee—could you not make it impossible that your King should be turned into the street.

SEIDEL : Not into the street, your Ma——

KING (*shouting and striking the desk*) : Into the street—into the street ! If I have to go to another house—another hotel—another anywhere—first I go into the street !

SEIDEL : Your Majesty, this is one of those things—you wouldn't think could happen anywhere.

KING : Those things all happen in America ! Only three weeks I am here, and already I know that. *Krashtovida* ! that I should come all the way from Poldavia to suffer this !

[*He sinks on the stool R. of desk exhausted, and sits eyeing first one, then the other. Then after a pause, quietly.*]

What do we do ? I am waiting for advice.



[*The doors L. are opened by ERASMUS.*

ERASMUS (*all smiles*) : Her Highness the Duchess of Tann.

[*The DUCHESS enters slowly. An attractive young woman about thirty. Although her type is that of the lively soubrette, she conveys at her first appearance the sweet graciousness and quiet poise of the great lady. She is dressed for the morning with perfect simplicity. She carries a large bunch of violets.*

ERASMUS goes out, closing the door. Her speech is a lazy purr—at present.

DUCHESS : Aah ! Your Excellency, how charmed I am that I see you again.

KAMP (*kissing her hand*) : Your Highness, I am honoured.

DUCHESS : And the dear Count who arrange everything for us so beautifully. (*Giving him her hand to kiss.*)

SEIDEL : Your Highness is the most welcome person in the world.

DUCHESS : But how nice—(*Leaning over the desk from L.*) Toutou, you were late for the conference—I can see it in your face.

[*The KING nods gloomily.*

But how naughty of you ! (*Smilingly shaking her finger at him she comes down to sit on the sofa.*) And your charming wife, Baron ?

KAMP : Longing to see your Highness again.

DUCHESS : So sweet, so—and this wonderful city with the big white palace with the dom—(*drawing the dome of the capital with her finger in the air*) and the big streets, and the trees, and sunshine, and spring ! (*She buries her nose in the violets.*) Wonderful people ! Wonderful land !

KING (*sulkily*) : There are no Americans in the room, Lonya.

DUCHESS : No—but that is how I feel. Even our

funny old-fashioned hotel with the so good name—Paradise !

*[The word falls with a splash into a silence which grows deathly. As she smells the violets again she becomes conscious of it, her eyes go from one to the other.]*

What is it ? Is anything wrong ?

KING : Wrong ! (*He sits glowering.*)

KAMP : Er—your Highness—I—er—we—er——  
(*An enormous sigh from the KING who goes to window C. and throws it open.*)

KING : Count, be good enough to relieve his Excellency of the necessity of saying nothing.

SEIDEL (*suavely*) : Two men, your Highness, came into your bedroom last night——

DUCHESS : You know that ?

[SEIDEL bows.]

It was very shocking—but they make many apologies.

*[A smile spreads on her face and grows to rocking laughter.]*

KING (*loudly turning*) : Why do you laugh ?

DUCHESS : You know why—but I hope you have not told them.

KING (*brusquely*) : They know !

DUCHESS (*laughing again*) : That you were seen by those men—in your pyjamas—dancing so badly the Black Bottom. Oh ! (*Dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief*) Can I ever forget it !

KING : No ! when you hear the rest ! (*Sits on stool below desk.*)

DUCHESS (*serious*) : The rest ?

SEIDEL : Your Highness, these two men are a well-known Senator and a clergyman of repute. They demand that you and his Majesty be turned out of your hotel immediately under an American law—because you were found in a

hotel bedroom—and you are not married, if your Highness will pardon my putting it bluntly.

DUCHESS (*incredulous*) : How could we be married—there is my husband—do they not understand?

SEIDEL : No, your Highness, the law has no understanding—it says “any man and woman not legally married—out!”

DUCHESS : They have such a law—in this wonderful country where everyone say so nice things to you? No, no——

SEIDEL : Yes, your Highness.

DUCHESS : And if we do not go out?

KING : They would send for the police.

DUCHESS : To put us in prison?

SEIDEL : To put you out.

DUCHESS : But how can they keep such a law in America? They are so little time married, and they change so quick that no one know who is married to who.

SEIDEL : The law, though humorous, is unpleasantly precise—and these two men have the power to make a scandal that would rock the Press on both sides of the Atlantic.

DUCHESS (*rising*) : A scandal! But that is terrible!—I am very angry. Your Excellency, why do you not tell us there is a law?

KAMP : Your Highness, we did not know.

DUCHESS : But you ought to know. Why do they not warn us?—they put on the grass “Keep off!”—why they not put in the rooms a ticket, “If you are not married get out!” A scandal?—It is terrible—it ruin everything! The loan——!

SEIDEL : Impossible!

DUCHESS : The concessions!

SEIDEL : Without the loan we do better elsewhere.

DUCHESS : Our tour—a fiasco ! And my husband, Toutou—he would have to take notice !

KING (*nodding*) : It would break his heart.

DUCHESS : Poor darling—a scandal ! He would swoon with a scented handkerchief to his big nose. But what are we to do ?

KING (*flinging his arms out*) : Nobody knows ! My advisers suggest we do something or nothing !—I have forgotten which.

SEIDEL : His Majesty's impatience is natural. But there is nothing we can do till we've seen these men, except ask for delay. Mr. Garcia has gone to ask them to wait till six o'clock.

DUCHESS : And who will see them ?

SEIDEL : I will, your Highness.

DUCHESS : And then ?

SEIDEL : Find out what they want ?

DUCHESS : We are in a pretty mess. Toutou, is the big brain not working ? (*Stroking his hair.*)

KING : In Chicago when there is someone they do not want they have a very useful thing, they—they——

DUCHESS : Bomp them off——

KING (*nodding*) : Could we not bump ?

DUCHESS : That is not very subtle.

SEIDEL : And they don't bump in Washington, your Majesty.

DUCHESS : Of course we cannot bomp—but might we not buy ?

SEIDEL : Garcia thinks not.

DUCHESS : It is the scandal they want.

SEIDEL : I wonder. If they'd wanted the scandal they could have struck at once—had it last night—had it in the papers this morning—some of them. But they didn't.

DUCHESS : Why ?



SEIDEL : In the language of the country, your Highness—they've "got something on you"—

DUCHESS : I see, and they use that something because they want something else ?

SEIDEL (*nodding*) : They may.

DUCHESS : Well, if it is something we can give——

[*The telephone rings. SEIDEL sits L. of desk, and takes up the receiver.*]

SEIDEL : Put him through—Count Seidel speaking, yes. (*Longish pause.*) Nothing else ? (*Covers the phone.*) They give you till four o'clock, on these conditions : that they have an interview with his Excellency and—that his Majesty shall be present.

KING : *Krashtovida !* (*About to rise. The Duchess stops him with her hand.*)

DUCHESS : We accept !

SEIDEL (*to the phone*) : Agreed. (*Slight pause—he covers the phone.*) At what time will his Excellency receive them ?

KAMP : Er—we—er lunch at one.

KING : Not before lunch—no ! I am hungry !

SEIDEL : The later the better—may I suggest two-thirty ?

DUCHESS (*nodding*) : Yes.

KAMP : Er—yes, yes, two-thirty.

SEIDEL (*to the phone*) : His Excellency will receive them at half after two—yes. (*Hangs up.*)

DUCHESS : So they want something else. I wonder—what ?

[*She stands wondering, twisting the KING's hair. The KING sits staring at SEIDEL. The AMBASSADOR tries to think.*]

*The Curtain is lowered for a moment to suggest the lapse of two hours.*

*When the Curtain rises again it is after lunch. Two*

*doors leading into the reception room L. are wide open, also all the windows. Coffee is being served on a large silver tray borne by ERASMUS. With him a FOOTMAN in livery carrying a tray of liqueurs. BARONESS KAMP, an American lady, much older than her husband, with white hair and yellowish face, is standing down R. with the KING. The DUCHESS is just outside the centre window on the terrace with MILTON LEE. The AMBASSADOR is down L., behind sofa, earnestly conversing with CURTIS—figures probably, for CURTIS is tapping a notebook with a gold pencil.*

BARONESS (*pointing to the R. wall*) : That tapestry there—genuine seventeenth-century Italian.

KING (*putting up his eyeglass*) : Beautiful !

BARONESS : Cost two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

KING : So much ?

BARONESS : It's very old. That clock over there on the mantel belonged to Marie Antoinette. (*Points L.*)

KING (*turning*) : Ah, ha !

BARONESS : But that is worth only forty thousand dollars.

KING : Well, it is comparatively new.

ERASMUS : Coffee, your Majesty ?

KING : Thank you—pour it out for me, Erasmus.

DUCHESS (*in high laughing voice*) : No, no, no, I cannot believe it !

LEE : Sure—cost us two million dollars.

ERASMUS : Sugar, your Majesty ?

KING : Three spoonfuls, Erasmus. (*Holding up three fingers.*)

BARONESS : I have two passions—very, very old antiques—and Spiritualism.

KING : The past and the future—charming.

ERASMUS : Black, your Majesty ?

KING (*nods*) : The best colour in the world, Erasmus.

[ERASMUS, *beaming*, hands him his cup and takes tray round to BARONESS.

BARONESS : Your Majesty is interested in Spiritualism ?

KING : No—my passion is the present. Who is that beautiful girl—I was watching her at lunch. (*Looking across at a very lovely girl who has just strolled on with OLVEN.*)

BARONESS : That's the richest heiress of the Middle West—Miss Mamie Hatch. (*Calling*) Mamie ! (*Then impressively confidential*) Worth thirty-five million dollars to-day, and more coming some day.

KING : Ah well, she can afford to wait.

BARONESS (*as MAMIE arrives*) : Your Majesty, let me present Miss Hatch—Miss Hatch, his Majesty.

KING (*shaking hands*) : How do you do, Miss Hatch ?

MAMIE : Oh, your Majesty, I'm very well indeed and perfectly thrilled to meet you. Say—what do you think of America ?

KING : You give us no time to think—I can only admire.

[*They go up R.*

*The BARONESS leaving them, with a fostering smile, has gone up C. as the DUCHESS comes down with LEE. Coffee and liqueurs having been served, ERASMUS goes out.*

DUCHESS : For me I like the best Chicago and New Orleans—so different. But his Majesty like Hollywood—

LEE : The films ?

DUCHESS (*shaking her head*) : The beautiful girls—he could hardly go away.

[*The KING and Miss HATCH go out on the terrace.*  
LEE (*looking round*) : He's gone away with a good one this time.

BARONESS (*archly smiling*) : Well, why not—a Royal widower—and a royal fortune—such things can happen.

DUCHESS (*with hauteur*) : They can not, Baroness. His Majesty will not marry again. His devotion to the memory of her late Majesty is something you do not know. (*Turning away and sitting L. of sofa.*)

BARONESS (*sitting*) : How very touching !

DUCHESS : My dear husband he say to me many times—"Lonya, if you die, I do not marry any woman—I keep his example before me."

LEE : You've sure got one on us in husbands.

DUCHESS : In America to be a husband is an accident, in Europe it is a career.

LEE (*pulling out his watch*) : Gummie, it's gone two ! Business, Baroness. (*Shaking hands*) Guess we must be off—had a wonderful time—(*Crossing and shaking hands with the DUCHESS while CURTIS says good-bye to the BARONESS*) Duchess.

DUCHESS : Your business men, what a life ! Torn between one beautiful wife and two lovely stenographers.

LEE (*laughing*) : I have six.

DUCHESS : Wives ?

LEE : Stenogs.

DUCHESS : Turk !—*au revoir*.

CURTIS (*shaking hands with DUCHESS*) : He's boasting. Don't let his Majesty forget——

DUCHESS : To-night, no, no.

LEE (*to KAMP*) : Twelve to-morrow.

KAMP : To-morrow ! Yes—er—twelve, yes, yes.

[LEE, CURTIS, and KAMP go out L. The DUCHESS



*is looking anxiously back at the window, evidently annoyed.*

BARONESS : I should just love to get his Majesty interested in Spiritualism——

DUCHESS : No, no, his Majesty is quite otherwise—you do not know him.

*[The girl's high ringing laugh is heard from the terrace. The DUCHESS goes quickly to the centre window, then calls in her most dulcet tone.]*

Your Majesty !

*[The KING and MISS HATCH return.]*

In a few minutes—the so important conference—it is almost time.

MISS HATCH : His Majesty has been saying the cutest things to me—I'm just tickled to death.

DUCHESS : I am sure his Majesty is tickled too—you are very pretty.

*[MISS HATCH laughs delightedly.]*

MISS HATCH (*shaking hands*) : Good-bye, Duchess—it's been just too wonderful to meet you. Good-bye, your Majesty !

KING (*impressively kissing her hand*) : I hope *not* good-bye.

MISS HATCH : Well, the world's a cute little place—you never can tell ! (*She crosses to the BARONESS who stands smiling benignly near doors L.*) I've had the kick of my young life, Baroness—it's just been swell.

BARONESS (*going out with her*) : Mamie, we must squeeze you in somehow at the luncheon to-morrow——

*[Their voices die away.]*

DUCHESS : To-morrow, ha ! What will happen before that ? What have you been saying to her, Toutou ? (*Sharply.*)

KING : Oh, I tell her what I think of America—of the people—of the principal products——

DUCHESS : You talk geography ? Ha, ha ! For you the principal product of America is the pretty girls.

[*The KING laughs loudly, sitting R. of desk.*

DUCHESS (*then leaning across the desk, sweetly*) : I am not jealous. I only want it kept out of the newspapers—no more Hollywood—“Royal Traveller and Red-Headed Star of *Hotsy Totsy*.” The newspapers ! (*A sharp sigh.*) What is to happen ? (*She sits L.*) I can feel them—all round us—with their million eyes ! I feel that if I open my mouth they jump down my throat and print my inside.

[COUNT SEIDEL *carrying a sheet of paper enters quickly R.*

SEIDEL (*coming to head of desk*) : Your Majesty, your Highness—Mr. Pyke has just left me—our American legal adviser—of course I gave him no names—I put an imaginary case——

KING : Well ?

SEIDEL : The law is against us. Under title 22 U.S. Code immunity would apply to his Majesty, but *not* to her Highness.

[*The DUCHESS takes the paper from him and reads.*  
Even if we succeeded in hushing it up—pulling strings—in his opinion it would be difficult to avoid the scandal.

[KAMP *enters R.*

KAMP : I have left instructions that they are to be sent to the Chancelry entrance when they arrive.

KING : Baron, have you no cellars in the Embassy ?

KAMP : Er—we have a wine cellar, your Majesty, but why ?

KING : To lock them up !

DUCHESS : In a wine cellar ! Oh, no, no, they like that too much.

KAMP : We are not in Poldavia, your Majesty.

KING (*furious*) : I do not need that you say silly things to me ! It is good for you that we are not in Poldavia !

SEIDEL (*looking at second paper*) : I have just made some hurried enquiries about Senator Corcoran. (*Reads*) "Humble origin, Irish descent. Born 1890 Cactus Valley, Colorado, State Senator, last election head of the poll. Owns big copper mine in Rio Blanco, small gold mine near Lake City, an oil field in Mexico, and other interests. Very wealthy, but not a money power. No wife, no family. Popular, but few close friends. Good speaker and good shot. Plays a lone hand. Neither wet nor dry."

DUCHESS : That tells us everything except what we want to know.

SEIDEL : Of the Rev. Adam Bride Macadam—(*reads*) "Highly respected—small church Kansas City—morals rigid and frigid—President of the W.I.T.G."——(*He peers at the MSS.*)

KING : Another President !

SEIDEL : "Women's—Interstate Temperance Guild."

DUCHESS : That is all ?

SEIDEL : Yes, your Highness.

OLVEN (*opening door R.*) : Senator Corcoran and the Reverend Adam Macadam in the waiting room.

SEIDEL : In a moment—I'll ring.

[OLVEN closes the door.]

DUCHESS (*rising*) : It is not possible, of course, that I am present—(*With a little laugh*) I might have to blush.

[SEIDEL goes to doors L.]

Toutou—say as little as possible—your Excellency the same. Then they think, perhaps, you

both have an ace up your sleeve. (*She goes towards doors*) Count, you must do the talk.

[SEIDEL bows.

How annoying my modesty drives me away—I miss all the fun.

[*With a laugh she goes out.*

SEIDEL closes the doors, comes to desk, presses bell. The KING crosses and stands in front of fireplace. KAMP sits at desk. SEIDEL stands above him. OLVEN shows in the two men and goes out. The SENATOR is big, bronzed, with strong mouth and chin, dressed in a dark double-breasted lounge suit. MACADAM is in black with turned down collar and white bow tie. They stand in front of the desk.

KAMP (*who has risen*) : Senator Corcoran, I presume ?

CORCORAN : Yeah.

KAMP : His Majesty has—er—graciously consented to be present at our—er—interview. (*Turning to the KING.*)

CORCORAN : Oh yeah ?

[*He bows stiffly to the KING who inclines his head.* My friend the Reverend Adam Bride Macadam has graciously consented to accompany me.

[MACADAM bows stiffly. *A slight pause.*

Well, your Majesty, and gentlemen, I guess the interview isn't going to be pleasant for you, any more than for us. Let's treat it as a matter of business, and get it over quick.

[*The KING sits L. on sofa.*

KAMP : Be seated, gentlemen. (*Waving his hand.*)

[MACADAM sits R. of table holding his hat in front of him, CORCORAN throws his hat on the table, turns a chair, and sits facing them. SEIDEL comes slowly down to the back of the sofa.

CORCORAN : May I say right here that we regret the necessity of taking action. But American



law has been broken ; as good American citizens it is our duty to see that the law-breakers pay the penalty.

SEIDEL (*suavely*) : If the law has been broken—it was broken in ignorance——

MACADAM : Ignorance is no defence in law. (*His voice has the rasp of a saw.*)

SEIDEL : —by two very distinguished visitors at the moment guests of the American people.

CORCORAN : The guests are self-invited—the object of their visit is commercial—you can cut that damn stuff right out.

SEIDEL (*still suave*) : Naturally their visit has a commercial side—but if this immense enterprise is successful, who is going to profit most by it?—the American people.

CORCORAN : Talk sense ! What in hell is it going to profit the American people if a bunch of damn oil bugs grab concessions in Europe and use the American people's money to start the grab?

MACADAM (*fiercely*) : What shall it profit a man to gain——

CORCORAN : Easy, Mac, easy—we're not in church. (*To SEIDEL*) You leave the American people out of this.

MACADAM (*passionately*) : The American people cannot be left out !—their law has been violated—flagrantly violated. The American people have been outraged in their deepest conviction. If I'd had my way the law would have struck the evildoer in his course. (*Striking the table.*)

CORCORAN : Sure !—if I hadn't been able to convince my reverend friend that the exceptional circumstances of the case called for circumscribed action we should not be here—now——(*Looking across*) And your Majesty would not be here either.

SEIDEL : You say the American people have been outraged in their deepest conviction. But they can't be outraged—unless you tell them.

CORCORAN : Their law is outraged even if we don't tell them.

MACADAM : It is the moral right of the people to know the truth of the abominations in their midst !

KAMP (*bending forward rubbing his hands*) : Yes, gentlemen, but what is the truth in this case ?

CORCORAN : Mr. Ambassador, we know all there's to it !

KAMP : His Majesty's visit, as you are already aware, is concerned with—er—important commercial negotiations. But are you aware that her Highness the Duchess of Tann is here solely as—er—the representative of her husband, the Chancellor of Poldavia? I ask you, gentlemen, could anything be more natural, more—er—proper than that his Majesty, wishing to confer, with her Highness on these vital negotiations should—er—visit her in her room—and—er—er—an informal Cabinet Council in fact?

CORCORAN : I get your point Mr. Ambassador. I was not aware that at Cabinet Councils in Europe, the official costume is pyjamas, that some of the parties are in bed, and that business is introduced by dancing in front of a mirror—

MACADAM : An obscene dance——

CORCORAN : Any dance would of course be in order—(*to KAMP*) but I thank you for the information.

KING : Your Excellency would do well to remember the advice that your silence is our most valuable asset.

[KAMP *bows*.

Gentlemen, I already know the matter is serious, I had no idea it is so serious as you say. I had no idea that my—my—very personal

and private relations with a brilliant and distinguished lady could so concern the people of America—could, how did you say, “outrage their deepest convictions.” If I had known that I should not have come—I should not have broken your law.

MACADAM : Our law makes no provision for the laxity of European morals.

KING : Naturally—but might there not be some slight margin for international manners ?

MACADAM : Your Majesty, we are not here to debate the sophistries of corrupt social refinements—we are here to vindicate the law of the United States—the law also of a power that is above them.

CORCORAN : Sure ! We take our stand on the law. There is nothing to discuss—we have come here to dictate. We have made every possible concession to avoid scandal while exacting in full the penalties which must have followed the action of the law. (*Taking a document from his pocket*) These are our terms—I have put them in the form of a binding contract.

*[He reads, not as a lawyer reciting a contract, but as an orator promulgating a new declaration of independence.]*

“ *We the undersigned*, having by accident entered Room No. 48, Paradise Hotel, Washington, D.C., about 12.45 a.m. on Monday, May 13th, 1933, became witnesses of an offence against the law of the United States—Mann Act (hereinafter referred to as the said offence), whereof the delinquents are Augustus X, King of Poldavia, widower, and (blank), wife of (blank) Duke of Tann, Chancellor of Poldavia (hereinafter referred to as the said delinquents). *Now in consideration* of the following facts :

- (a) That the said delinquents are, in the country of their origin, persons of the highest standing.

- (b) That the said delinquents are, at present, visitors and, as it were, guests of the United States.
- (c) That the publication of the said offence might be followed by national, international, or domestic complications.

*We the undersigned hereby agree as follows :*

To take no action to set the law in motion against the said delinquents.

Not to publish or cause to be published, or communicate to any person whatsoever any circumstance appertaining to the said offence.

*On the following conditions :*

- 1° That the said delinquents shall not later than 2 p.m. to-morrow, May 14th, 1933, quit the above mentioned precincts and the city of Washington, and on the day following the United States of America never to return.
- 2° That all negotiations for issue of loan known as ' Poldavian National Bonds ' be abandoned forthwith, and that at no time shall any loan, concession, or grant be negotiated directly or through intermediary by the said delinquents with any Company, corporation, or citizen of the United States of America.

(Signed.) BERNARD J. CORCORAN,  
ADAM BRIDE MACADAM."

*(He rises, going up to the desk.)* We require the signatures of his Majesty and the Duchess of Tann to the appendix. *(Reading quickly)* "We the undersigned hereby admit the said offence and agree to abide by the above mentioned conditions (1) and (2)." *(Lays the document on the desk before Kamp.)*

[SEIDEL comes over and stands reading. The KING rises slowly.



KING : We cannot sign this—it is impossible—it is the destruction of everything we have worked for for years—it is—— (*He pauses.*)

[MACADAM rises.

KAMP : Your Majesty—er—I am entirely of your opinion.

CORCORAN : If that is your Majesty's last word—we are going straight to the Police department—and the facts will be given immediately to the Press.

[*A slight pause.*

SEIDEL (*quietly*) : Your Majesty, may I submit—in the circumstances there is no alternative.

[*The KING stares at him in silence for a moment.*

KING : Is it necessary that her Highness is dragged into this ?

CORCORAN : Yes, your Majesty.

KING : Your Excellency, will you——

KAMP : Yes, your Majesty.

[*Rises and goes out L.*

CORCORAN (*sitting and taking document*) : Duchess's Christian name ?

SEIDEL : Illonya. (*As CORCORAN takes out fountain pen.*)

CORCORAN : Spell it.

SEIDEL : I-l-l-o-n-y-a.

CORCORAN (*writing*) : Il-lonya. Husband's name ?

SEIDEL : Anastasius Joseph Francis Xavier Clement.

CORCORAN (*writing*) : An-as-ta-si-us etcetera. (*He turns the document round and rises.*)

[*SEIDEL is above the chair in which the KING now sits, running his eye over the paper.*

KING : Where do I sign ?

SEIDEL : There, your Majesty. (*He puts a finger on the spot, handing a pen to the King, who signs. Slight pause.*) Senator, what do you get out of this ?

CORCORAN : Nothing.

[*The DUCHESS enters slowly L., followed by KAMP, who closes the door. The KING rises and stands above chair.*

KING (*turning to her*) : Your Highness, I regret that it will be necessary for you to add your signature to this—this American declaration of moral independence.

[*The DUCHESS sits, takes the pen from the KING, and after running an eye over the paper, signs and sits silently watching CORCORAN, who takes another document from his pocket.*

CORCORAN : This is the signed counterpart. (*He places it in front of her, taking the other which he folds and pockets.*)

[*MACADAM has risen and come up, SEIDEL has pressed the bell.*

CORCORAN : Well ! I guess everything is now O.K.

[*He gives a little bow, goes out with MACADAM past OLVEN, who holds the door and closes it after them. KAMP moves down to the fireplace, the KING to the back of the desk, SEIDEL a little towards door R. The DUCHESS, who is studying the document, suddenly begins to laugh.*

DUCHESS : “ The said delinquents ! ” (*Holding it up*) All is lost—except honour !

CURTAIN

## ACT II

SCENE : *The DUCHESS's room at the Paradise Hotel.*  
*On the right a French window opening on to a balcony. The window hung with rich curtains. In the back wall a very wide archway hung with tapestries—representing “The Rape of the Sabine Women”—which shut off that part of the room which is bedroom. Across the left corner a door leading to a small lobby, and thence to the hotel corridor. An inlaid Spanish table against the wall L. A round table with inlaid marble top and three chairs farther to the right. In front of the window a chaise-longue, and beside it a stool ; against the wall R. back a Gothic cabinet ; on either side of the centre opening suits of armour on stands, each supporting a halberd on which hangs an antique lantern containing electric light. Above the door L. a magnificent pair of antlers mounted on a shield. Lamps, pots of flowers, etc. Below the window a common radiator disguised in brown and gold paint. When the centre tapestries are drawn back the further part of the room is seen to be decorated in pale primrose and gold. The bed, which is in the centre, has golden canopy and hangings, the very low rail at the foot is a gilded arabesque of wrestling cupids. On the left of the bed a small table. Near it a tall gilt cheval glass. The décor is rich, in parts even beautiful, but obviously inspired by a grim determination to look the price.*

*When the curtain rises it is about 10.30 in the evening of the same day. Some of the lamps in the front room are lighted, also the lamp hanging from the canopy, which floods the bed with pale golden radiance.*

GUNNING, a very superior English maid, is engaged in turning down the bedclothes. Between forty and fifty, tall, thin, and constitutionally virginal, she is dressed in black with stiff white collar and cuffs, a small purple silk apron, and looks permanently starched. In a thin, high-pitched voice she is singing to herself an English music-hall song.

GUNNING :

“ Don’t have mo-er, Mrs. Mo-er.

Mrs. Mo-er, please don’t have any mo-er,

The more you have, the more you want—they  
say,

An’ enough is as good as a feast—

*(Shaking the pillow)*—any day.

If you have any mo-er, Mrs. Mo-er, *(She disappears L.)*

You’ll never get to your street door,

Too many double gins gives the ladies double  
chins—

Don’t have any mo-er, Mrs. Mo-er.”

*[She reappears, carrying a silk nightdress and an elaborate dressing-gown, beginning the song again. She lays the dressing-gown and nightdress on the bed, disappears, and returns with a pair of mules, then comes down to the little table R. of chaise-longue, gives another look round, then suddenly, with a sharp scream :*

Who’s that ?

VOICE *(outside)* : Jees ! don’t yell—it’s me.

GUNNING : Who’s me ?

VOICE : Near scared the life out o’ me.

*[MACABE puts his head through the curtains.*

GUNNING : Who are you—what are you doing  
out there ?

MACABE *(stepping in)* : Havin’ me ears pierced—  
I’m the hotel detective.

GUNNING : Well, there’s no crime in here.

MACABE : Ain’t there ? That singin’ o’ yours  
oughta get the third degree ! I see her Highness  
ain’t back yet.

GUNNING : No.

*[She looks round, and being one of the many millions in England and America for whom a bed will always be an improper piece of furniture, goes up quickly,*



*presses a button L. of centre opening, which closes the tapestries over it.*

MACABE : Got anything on the hip ?

GUNNING (*putting her hands to her hips and turning on him*) : How dare you !

MACABE : In yer lock-up, then ?—cold work, watchin' out there.

GUNNING : Pity you didn't do some watching last night.

MACABE : You've said a mouthful. (*Taking an automatic from his pocket*) But from now on that balcony's unhealthy—the chief wanted me train a machine-gun on it. (*Pocketing pistol*) Be a sport—how about a li'l drink ?

GUNNING : Tch ! what a country ! A hundred and forty million people with their tongues hanging out ! (*Takes out glass and whisky bottle*) Say when.

MACABE : Can't pronounce it.

GUNNING : There—that's more than's good for you. Soda ?

MACABE : Not on your life ! Here's how. (*Drinks.*) That's got t'keep me warm till one.

GUNNING : Till one !

MACABE : Sure—then Cohen takes over.

GUNNING : Perhaps you might have a drop more so.

MACABE : I'll say I might.

GUNNING :

“Don't have any more, Mrs. More,  
Mrs. More, please don't have any——”

[*Pouring out a stiff one.*]

MACABE : That's a bum song.

GUNNING (*shocked*) : Well, really——

MACABE : One o' them dry propaganda hymns,

I guess. Oh "when" all right. (*Toasting her*)  
"She certainly had beautiful eyes."

GUNNING : Oh, go on ! What did happen actually last night ?

MACABE : What happened ? (*Then suddenly discreet*) Oh, nothin'—couple of unauthorised persons got into the wrong room.

GUNNING : That all ?

MACABE : Sure.

GUNNING : I know, her Highness was disturbed——

MACABE : Sure—accident—forget it.

GUNNING : Everyone in the place knows something happened—they've got several stories. But the floor waiter told me——

MACABE : Well, they're all wet.

GUNNING : The floor waiter told me a bell-boy told him——

MACABE : Don't you listen to them guys.

GUNNING : Quite dreadful it was.

MACABE : 'Twasn't—nothing happened—absolutely.

GUNNING (*decisively*) : Then why am I told to have everything packed by twelve to-morrow ?

MACABE : Gee ! to-morrow ! You got one on me there.

GUNNING : So something *must* have happened—what about another little drop.

MACABE (*handing her the glass*) : Kid, you burn me up !

[*She goes to take the bottle. A knock at the door. She slams the cabinet door on the drink question, and turns primly.*]

GUNNING : Come in.

[*GARCIA enters, with a big vase of yellow roses ; he is on his toes after his escape.*]

GARCIA : I thinka maybe her Highness lika the beautiful roses—just arrive—ten o'clock—from the South. (*Putting the vase on writing table L. and stepping back to admire*) Say it with flowers. "I am so glad everything it is all right."  
(*Turning*) Macabe—whata you do in here?

MACABE : Heard a scream, chief—stepped in to investigate.

GARCIA : Scream—what scream?

GUNNING : Me, Mr. Garcia. I heard a step on the balcony.

GARCIA : Ah so ! You gotta be careful—not safe any more on the balcony. (*To MACABE*) Gotta the gun?

MACABE : Sure, chief. (*Pressing a hand to his side.*)

GARCIA : Good—and don't forget, shoota first—aska the question afterward.

MACABE (*going*) : O.K., chief.

GUNNING (*alarmed*) : But, good gracious, if one of us went—

MACABE : You should worry, I ain't shootin' to kill—just a friendly warning. (*Turning at the curtains*) Say, chief—you heard about this packing?

GARCIA : What packing?

MACABE : Everything to be packed ready by twelve to-morrow.

GUNNING : Her Highness gave me the order when she was dressing for dinner—his Majesty's man says Colonel Menken gave them all the same orders.

GARCIA (*dumbfounded*) : What does it mean?

MACABE : Search me.

GARCIA : To-morrow !—they stay only a day and a half, and I spenda all that money to make the rooms lika a palace. (*To GUNNING*) Do you know what I do to this room—I make exact copy

from a postcard my mother senda me—one little room in his Majesty's palace in Zaoum. (*Showing her a postcard produced from his pocket-book*) The curtains, the walls, the furniture, the armour . . . everything.

GUNNING : And what is that ? (*Pointing to the tapestries.*)

GARCIA : That ? “ The Rape of the Sabine Women.”

GUNNING : The what ?

GARCIA : Oh well, “ the Founding of Rome ”—sama thing. (*Tearfully*) And all for a day and a half—I could almost weep. (*To MACABE*) The Senator he tell me before dinner—everything O.K. What can have happen ?

GUNNING : If you want to know what I heard——

[*They both turn to her.*

Oh no, I can't. (*Coyly.*)

GARCIA : Yes, yes.

MACABE : Spill it.

GUNNING : Well, the floor waiter told me that one of the bell-boys told him that there was a clergyman with the Senator in his rooms last night—a Reverend Macadam—and he had a lot of drink, and wasn't used to it, and he got mad and rushed out along the balcony, and into her Highness's room, and there was she in bed and—well really—anyway, his Majesty heard her screaming for help, and rushed in just in time and knocked the reverend gentleman right out—gentleman, I don't think, nor reverend—one right on the jaw, and the Senator had to come in and take him away, and now they're all terrified of its getting in the papers.

MACABE : Can you beat it ?

GARCIA : No, but I sacka that floor waiter this minute. (*Going*) And I sock him one on the jaw.

[*Goes out L.*



GUNNING (*hurrying to the door*) : Oh, Mr. Garcia—no—not the waiter—the bell-boy told him——

GARCIA (*outside*) : And I sacka the bell-boy. (*He bangs the outer door.*)

GUNNING (*closing door*) : There—what did I tell you—course it's true.

MACABE : Yer crazy.

GUNNING : I never did like clergymen—my father was a seafaring man.

MACABE : Say, ain't there a shy drink waitin' in that cupboard ?

GUNNING : It's too shy to come out—it's had time to think and so have I. Get along now—I've got to look after myself, and I expect you're no better than the clergy when you've got a few drinks in you. (*Fussing about tidying the room.*) Her Highness'll be back any minute now. (*Shaking the cushions on the couch.*)

MACABE : You're English, ain't ye ?

GUNNING : Of course I am.

MACABE : Ye look it.

GUNNING (*sings*) : "Don't have any more, Mrs. Mo-er——"

MACABE : Oh crimes !

[*Goes out R. with his hands to his ears.*]

GUNNING :

"Mrs. Mo-er, please don't have any more. The more you have the more you want they say.

(*Crosses L. and arranges the roses*)

And enough is as good as a feast any day.

If you have any more, Mrs. Mo-er,

You'll never get to your—

(*Sniffs the roses.*)—street door,  
Too many double gins gives the ladies double  
chins.—(*Goes through curtains C.*)

Don't have any more, Mrs. More! "

[*The outer door is opened, and the DUCHESS and SEIDEL are heard trying to speak through their laughter. A moment later they come in, the DUCHESS in evening dress and cloak ; SEIDEL wears a coat over his evening dress and carries a hat.*

DUCHESS (*struggling with her laughter*) : What a story !—it is more fonny than the truth. (*Dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief.*)

SEIDEL : And the best of it is—it sounds more like the truth.

[*He is standing by the door about to go. She throws her cloak on couch.*

DUCHESS : Don't go—sit down a little minute.

[*He closes door and sits R. of table.*

(*She calls*) : Gonning !

[*GUNNING appears between curtains.*

GUNNING : Yes, your Highness.

DUCHESS : This story of yours you tell to Mr. Garcia ?

GUNNING : Oh, not my story, your Highness—it was the floor waiter told me—and the bell-boy told him——

DUCHESS : Well, do not you tell it anyone any more——

GUNNING : Oh no, your Highness.

DUCHESS : It might be dangerous.

GUNNING (*nodding*) : Yes, your Highness.

DUCHESS : You can wait out there. I go to bed soon.

GUNNING : Yes, your Highness.

[*Goes out L.*

DUCHESS (*sitting on stool R.C.*) : Oh, I am so miserable !

SEIDEL (*nodding sympathetically*) : Your Highness—I know——

DUCHESS : All for nothing !

SEIDEL : And our Embassy dinners are not precisely thrilling.

DUCHESS (*smiling*) : It was dull—— (*Jumping up with cry of joy*) Oh, the beautiful roses ! (*Going L.*) When I see flowers I forget everything else in the world. (*She buries her face in the roses, then looking up with a sigh of content*) If anyone want to seduce me, he could do it with flowers.

SEIDEL : I shall make a note of that.

DUCHESS (*laughing*) : Oh—Count—I forget you are a man. (*Then, seeing his expression, laughs again.*)

SEIDEL : And I flattering myself I was still dangerous !

DUCHESS (*leaning over the table*) : You are delightful—if it was not for you I could—burn our Embassy at Washington. Aie ! Aie ! (*Sits L. of table. Then seriously*) What do we do to-morrow at twelve ?

SEIDEL : Exactly the same as if—we shall meet for the signing of the concessions and the loan preliminaries as if nothing had happened. We shall discuss, and then at the appropriate moment we produce—— (*Putting his hand in his breast pocket*) Oh, you haven't seen the final draft of the cable I suggested—— (*Takes out cable-form.*)

DUCHESS : To my husband——

SEIDEL (*nodding—reads*) : “ Please send immediate fast cable English as follows. Stop. Cabinet Council to-day passed unanimously resolution declaring imperative entire proceeds proposed American Loan be allocated to military establishment. Stop. Owing international situation here this step vital to security. Stop. Safety first.

“ Signed TANN CHANCELLOR. Stop.

His Majesty and Duchess of Tann in agreement.  
Stop. His Majesty thinks advisable holding  
Cabinet Council *after* cable despatched.

“Signed KAMP.”

(*He puts it on table before her.*) That went, of  
course, in code.

DUCHESS : And so *they* will break off negotiations.  
(*Giving him cable.*)

SEIDEL : If this won't do it, we shall have to try  
dynamite.

DUCHESS : And our faces are saved——

SEIDEL (*nodding*) : His Excellency calls on the  
President—regretful rupture—all engagements  
cancelled—you leave at two—and the evening  
papers headline, “Last Minute Crash of Pol-  
davian Oil Deal.”

[*A slight pause.*]

DUCHESS (*slowly*) : And we save our face. Saving  
face—the world spends half its time at it!  
(*Lightly she runs two fingers over her face with a wry  
smile.*) And woman half her life! (*Turning  
quickly*) Do men?

SEIDEL : No. (*He laughs.*) Well, a little—some-  
times—perhaps.

DUCHESS : What you use? (*Kneeling on her seat  
and leaning across.*)

SEIDEL : Duchess, really—the secrets of my  
toilet——

DUCHESS : No, no—tell me—I am curious.

SEIDEL (*leaning towards her*) : Water entirely free  
from worry. I never worry, and I never know  
what I shall do next.

DUCHESS : You are an opportunist.

SEIDEL : The sneer of the people who miss their  
opportunities.

DUCHESS : Yes—I must not worry—you are  
right. It is over—we begin again. There is the



British group—the Dutch—even the French——

SEIDEL : *Faute de mieux.*

DUCHESS : But I *hate* to lose.

SEIDEL : We have still our oil——

DUCHESS : And I have still my honour. (*She laughs, crossing C.*) You think there was no loop-hole ?

SEIDEL : I could see none.

DUCHESS : I wish I had been there.

SEIDEL : I was relieved you were not.

DUCHESS : Poor Toutou ! I hope he does not try too much to keep his spirits up.

SEIDEL : His Majesty has a strong head.

DUCHESS : For wine—yes. (*Holding out her hand*) Good night.

SEIDEL (*kissing her hand*) : Good night, your Highness.

DUCHESS : Thank you that you see me home.

SEIDEL : The best moment of my day. (*Going to door.*)

DUCHESS : We sleep on it, Count, eh ?

SEIDEL : Yes, but no dreams—facts. Good night.

[*Goes out.*]

*A moment later the outer door slams. The DUCHESS stands leaning on the top of the couch, thinking furiously.*

GUNNING *enters.*

GUNNING : Does your Highness wish to go to bed ?

DUCHESS : Bed !—yes—why not ?

[*She stands staring in front of her.*]

Wait—I change my mind—I no go to bed.

GUNNING (*resigned*) : Very good, your Highness.

DUCHESS : Ring up the desk—and ask them to tell Mr. Garcia I would like to see him.

[GUNNING goes to phone on desk.

GUNNING : Desk, please . . . Is that the clerk ?  
(*Slight pause.*) Well, the *clurk* ! (*Throwing up her eyes*) Will you please tell Mr. Garcia her Highness would like to see him—at once. (*Hanging up*) He is coming “right up.”

[GUNNING picks up the cloak from stool R. C. and goes towards the bedroom. The DUCHESS, who has lighted a cigarette at the little table, moves towards the window and is going out. GUNNING, as she is slipping through the tapestries, sees her and stops her with a scream.

Don't go there, your Highness !

DUCHESS (*turning*) : What is it ?

GUNNING : The detective—out there—with a gun in his pocket ! If anyone steps on that balcony, his orders are to shoot.

DUCHESS : To shoot ?

GUNNING : I heard Mr. Garcia tell him—  
“Shoota first, aska the question afterward.”

DUCHESS : But it is absurd ! Why do they do that ?

GUNNING (*mysteriously*) : They don't want the goings-on of last night to happen again.

DUCHESS (*with a little laugh*) : They are wise, too late.

GUNNING : I wouldn't put my nose out—in a country where they shoot as freely as they spit—you can't be too careful.

[*She goes into bedroom. The DUCHESS stands for a moment then looks back at the window, then decides she won't, and is moving away, looks back again, steals up to the window, and holding the curtains apart cautiously bends forward to peep out.*

MACABE (*sharply in the distance*) : Who's there ?

[*She jumps back. GUNNING returns at the same moment.*]

GUNNING : Your Highness !

DUCHESS : It is all right—he aska the question first.

[*A knock. GUNNING goes to the door.*]

GUNNING : Mr. Garcia, your Highness.

DUCHESS : Please come in, Mr. Garcia.

[*GARCIA enters smiling and rubbing his hands.*]

GUNNING goes out, closing the door.

GARCIA (*bowing*) : Your Highness !

DUCHESS (*sitting on couch*) : There is something I want to ask you, Mr. Garcia.

GARCIA (*bowing*) : Your Highness may com-manda me—already I taka the liberty to bringa your Highness the little roses. (*He turns and beams on them.*)

DUCHESS : It was you ! But how kind—so lovely—— Mr. Garcia, I wanted to ask you—this—this Senator Corcoran—what for—what kind of man is he ?

GARCIA : The Senator ? (*He thinks.*) Well, he is whata you call a very tough gentleman.

DUCHESS : A criminal ?

GARCIA : No, no, no—he is a Senator.

DUCHESS : What he has done to us is a crime.

GARCIA : That is because he is tough, your Highness, but besida that——

DUCHESS : Is he—how do you say—a sport ?

GARCIA (*nodding*) : A good sport.

DUCHESS : He is not married ?

GARCIA : No, your Highness.

DUCHESS : Nor anything else ?

GARCIA : Not to the naked eye.

DUCHESS : I would like—if he will come to see me.

GARCIA : I thinka he is in his room, your Highness—I getta him on the phone.

DUCHESS : You say to him like this : Her Highness was not at the conference to-day—her Highness is aware that the matter is finally settled, but there are certain important points which she thinks it might advantage you to know. Her Highness would be pleased if you will come to see her ?

GARCIA (*at phone*) : Room 45 ! (*Slight pause.*) Is that Senator Corcoran ? Mr. Garcia speaking. Her Highness ask me to say that she was not at the conference to-day. Her Highness is aware that everything is finally settled but there are certain important questions which she thinks it would advantage you to know. Her Highness would be pleased if you would come to see her.

DUCHESS : Well ?

GARCIA : He say the Rev. Macadam is with him.

DUCHESS (*making a face*) : Oh !—Very well, say I am pleased if they both come.

GARCIA (*beaming*) : Her Highness say she will be pleased if you both come. (*Pause.*)

DUCHESS : What did he say ?

GARCIA : Nothing. There is an argument. (*Pause.*) O.K., Senator. He say, “ Hold on a minute.” (*Pause.*) Nothing but noise. *Che ! che !* (*Shocked*) The Reverend he calla you something . . . nota nice.

DUCHESS : What ?

GARCIA : I scarcely hear. Something in the Bible, I think. Now he has covered the phone. . . . I tell her Highness. (*Hangs up.*) He say . . . they come withouta prejudice.

DUCHESS : You go to meet them and show them in. Gunning !



GARCIA : At once, your Highness.

[Exit. Enter GUNNING.

DUCHESS : My despatch-box, quick ! " Something in the Bible " ? I think I can guess—that lady in the red dress who sit on the hornèd beast. So uncomfortable !

[GUNNING disappears through the curtains.

The DUCHESS goes to table beside the couch, puts out her cigarette on the ash-tray, then takes a key from her bag which is on the table.

GUNNING appears with a large green leather despatch-case.

Put it on the floor beside the desk !

[She crosses L. as GUNNING puts the despatch-box below the desk on the floor.

Put the roses in the other room.

[GUNNING goes off with the roses.

The DUCHESS going on one knee unlocks the despatch-box which is stuffed with bulky documents, throws half a dozen of them on the desk, then, leaving the despatch-box bulging with papers open, rises, unfolds some of the documents, and spreads them on the desk, then as GUNNING returns :

Make the cushions smooth !

[GUNNING smoothes and pats the cushions on the couch.

Now wait outside !

[GUNNING goes out. The DUCHESS takes a pair of dark horn-rimmed spectacles from a case on the desk, puts them on, sits, takes pen, some large sheets of paper, and begins to write. A moment later she turns, surveys the room carefully, then with a mischievous smile resumes writing.

A pause. Then a knock at the door. She does not reply, but writes and consults documents. Another knock.

DUCHESS : Come in ! (*Quietly, without looking up.*)

[GARCIA enters.]

GARCIA (*in a hushed tone*) : Senator Corcoran and the Reverend Adam Macadam to see your Highness.

[CORCORAN and MACADAM come on. GARCIA goes out closing the door.]

*For a moment she continues writing, then turning with a gracious gesture of her arm :*

DUCHESS : Gentlemen, will you please be so good to sit down. (*She returns to her writing, turning over a document and copying.*)

[MACADAM sits at the top of the round table staring at her puzzled.]

CORCORAN sits R. of table. He is in evening dress, dinner jacket. A moment after they have sat she lays down her pen.

I am, as you see, a woman of affairs. (*Turning in her chair.*) Forgive me that the sudden change of plan make me more busy.

[MACADAM gives a stiff little bow, CORCORAN watches her.]

First Senator, Mr. Macadam, permit I thank you, you are so good to come to see me.

MACADAM : Let it be understood our visit implies no deviation from——

DUCHESS (*emphatically*) : No, no—the affair is closed——

CORCORAN : I made that clear on the phone.

DUCHESS : Absolutely. No, the terms are as unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and Persians—or, I believe, the American constitution. I was not at the conference to-day—(*Lowering her voice and averting her face*) For a woman—it was too painful—I—I—need not say—I think you understand——

[MACADAM bows gravely. CORCORAN moves uneasily in his chair.]

But if I was there I would say to you some things about the two conditions (*she turns to the desk and takes up the counterpart of the agreement*) that I think no one say. (*Rising slowly*) The conditions are hard.

CORCORAN : Sure, damned hard—but just and absolutely fair.

DUCHESS : Oh ?

CORCORAN : If we'd let the law take its course, what'd have happened ? First you'd have had to quit the country. Second, you wouldn't have had a hope on Wall Street. Third, the deal would have collapsed. And the scandal would have been hair-raising. What do we do ? We exact the first three as conditions—and we *save* you from the scandal.

DUCHESS : That is true. I suppose really I ought to thank you——

MACADAM : If you have invited us here to make us defend——

DUCHESS : Oh no, Mr. Macadam—be patient—I come to it. (*She sits on the left of the table spreading the document before her.*)

[MACADAM moves a little away.]

Condition No. 1—Well, we go to-morrow. We have to find a way to break negotiations, to save our face. We have to cancel the luncheon to meet your President——

[A movement from MACADAM.]

Oh, it is quite right—you have to be very careful who your President meet—he could not sit at table with the two delinquents—it is the same in Europe, our royal families they are all very careful—they learn from history.

MACADAM : We don't need history—we have principle.

DUCHESS : Of course. Condition No. 2—I know it is necessary the present negotiations must break off. But why you make it impossible in the future America can get this business. It is a big business, and you drive us to England, to Holland, or another. What they gain America lose—Do you think America will thank you ?

CORCORAN (*chuckling*) : I know a few Americans 'll be as sore as hell !

DUCHESS (*insisting*) : But why, Senator ?

CORCORAN : Why don' we want this dam' bunch o' grafters to grab it ?—Ask him.

MACADAM : Because it is unclean in its source. Because no good can come from what is rooted in corruption. We have our own corruption, Heaven knows, but we who water the roots of the spiritual life of our country set our faces against the deeper decay of an older and rottener civilisation. We are rushing over the world after material gain—what will it profit us if we lose the strong, hard, clean, free soul that our founders left us ?

*[He leans his forehead on his tightly clenched fists. A pause. The DUCHESS rises, replaces the agreement on the desk and removes the spectacles.]*

DUCHESS : I understand how you feel, yes. (*She crosses to C.*) But Mr. Macadam make it very difficult. It is a case of morals before business.

*[MACADAM raises his head and stares fiercely at her.]*

CORCORAN : It is the case of law before everything—with all the moral trimmings the Reverend sees behind it.

DUCHESS (*drawing forward the stool and sitting*) : We break your law, yes—could we help it ? If you keep a law like a snake hidden in the bathroom, the first stranger who does not know it is there will get a bite. We break your law—because we are not married——



MACADAM : Because you are living in sin.

CORCORAN (*under his breath*) : Easy, Reverend—

DUCHESS (*laughing*) : I do not think of it like that. For a king it is difficult to be married. He could not marry me—except morganatic, and we think it better as it is—my husband is my very good friend. In my country everybody know, and nobody is shocked.

MACADAM : You had better have stayed in your country.

DUCHESS : I know that—too late. But I come here and you find out—by accident—if it *was* an accident—our relations—

MACADAM (*fiercely*) : Relations !—it was an orgy.

CORCORAN (*aside*) : Easy.

DUCHESS (*smiling*) : What you call an orgy, Mr. Macadam ?

MACADAM (*rising*) : Here in a public hotel in the heart of the capital of our country, a king dancing in his night clothes before a woman in bed beating the savage rhythm with her hands—that I call an orgy ! (*He sits.*)

CORCORAN : Say, Reverend, lay off ! This dancing king in his pyjamas has got your goat. What of it ! Didn't King David dance before the Ark— ?

MACADAM : The comparison is blasphemous—that was religious dancing.

CORCORAN : Well, I guess he danced before the lady in the bath an' she didn't even have pyjamas. This kinda talk ain't getting us nowhere. Duchess, you asked us here to show us something in the agreement, something important, something we didn't know. What is it—what do you want ?

DUCHESS (*drawing her stool nearer*) : This—we

keep all the terms—we break negotiations to-morrow—we leave Washington to-morrow—we sail next day. Only give us one thing. When we have got home—in a little time—let us re-open negotiations here in America. I promise I do not come——

MACADAM (*striking the table*) : It is a breach of faith to ask that——

[CORCORAN stops him with grip on the forearm.

CORCORAN (*quietly—shaking his head*) : You can't have it.

DUCHESS : I ask it because I know it is best for my country—and I think it be pretty good for America, too.

CORCORAN : I'm sorry.

DUCHESS : And I too am sorry. There is no more to say.

MACADAM (*touching CORCORAN on the shoulder*) : We have nothing else to wait for. (*Rising*) We ought not to have come.

DUCHESS (*rising*) : Oh, do not say that—it is always good to try. Thank you for coming. Good-night.

CORCORAN : Good-night, Duchess. (*He goes to the door and opens it.*)

[MACADAM opens his mouth, closes it firmly, bows stiffly and goes out, followed by CORCORAN closing the door.

*The outer door slams. The DUCHESS slowly sits on the stool.*

DUCHESS (*quietly intense*) : *Krashtovida !*

[*A moment later the door opens and GUNNING appears interrogatively.*

Yes—now I really go to bed.

[GUNNING closes the door and pulls the tapestries

apart. Then comes down, unclasps the necklace, and takes off the tiara.

*There is a knock at the door. GUNNING goes to it.*

GUNNING : Mr. Garcia, your Highness.

DUCHESS (*annoyed*) : Oh, come in.

[GARCIA enters, all smiles.]

GUNNING shuts the door and retires to the other room.

GARCIA : Your Highness, I thinka maybe you lika a little something——

DUCHESS (*shaking her head*) : No, no, I go to bed.

GARCIA (*holding his fingers an inch apart*) : Just a little caviare sandwich—and a little glass of Pommery twenty-one. Maka you sleep better——

DUCHESS (*shaking her head*) : Nothing make me sleep to-night.

GARCIA : Your Highness, taka my advice—I have it right here—at the door. Just a—— (*With a twirl of his fingers.*)

DUCHESS (*laughing*) : You are not possible to refuse.

GARCIA (*bows*) : Eduardo ! (*A waiter enters.*) I keepa this wine for the reporters. Prohibition is our protection from the Press. Thank God they are thirsty.

[*The waiter brings to the table a tray on which are a bottle of champagne and a glass, a plate of sandwiches and a dish of fruit. He is about to open the champagne when GARCIA waves him away.*]

*He goes out.*

GARCIA, opening the bottle.

The great people always needa little something before they go to bed. (*Pouring out a glass*) So ! (*Brings her the glass and the plate of sandwiches.*)

[GUNNING *takes out her crochet and sits on chair R. of bed.*

DUCHESS : Thank you.

GARCIA : Do not be afraid of the caviare, it is Bolshevik but beautiful.

DUCHESS (*takes a sandwich*) : You get a glass yourself, Mr. Garcia, no ?

GARCIA (*bowing*) : I thank your Highness, but I never touch it—I am very acid.

DUCHESS (*sipping*) : It is good.

GARCIA : Your Highness—there is a rumour to-night, amonga the servants, that I contradict very emphatic—I am very angry.

DUCHESS : Oh ?

GARCIA : That your Highness and his Majesty go away to-morrow.

DUCHESS : But who invent such a fairy tale ? (*Laughing.*)

GARCIA : They see someone packing, then they thinka too dam' much—if you excuse me.

DUCHESS : Mr. Garcia, I trust to you a secret—  
[*He bows.*

—the packing is diplomatic. To-morrow is the conference—they have heard we are packed, ready to jomp—then we get what we want.

[*He beams, extending his hands.*

Diplomacy was given us to conceal our intentions.

GARCIA (*nodding*) : I getta you. (*Confidentially*) And the other—Macadam and the Senator—that is now O.K.

DUCHESS : Yes, yes, it is now, as you say, O.K.

GARCIA : Dio ! that maka me feel good ! If that horrible thing had happen to his Majesty and your Highness, here in my hotel, I breaka my heart. My mother is born in Poldavia—she liva



there now—she go back to her people when my father die. Looka your Highness ! (*Giving her the postcard.*)

DUCHESS : Oh, the little ante-room at Zaoum ! I thought it seem familiar——

GARCIA (*waving his arm*) : The furniture—the armour—the horns that his Majesty shoota—

DUCHESS (*looking round*) : So—indeed !

GARCIA : Justa like home. (*Taking the postcard*) Good night, your Highness.

DUCHESS : Good-night. (*He goes to the door.*) Mr. Garcia, I can trust you that no one repeat that story of Macadam—that he try to get in my bed.

GARCIA : Your Highness can trust me. If I hear a word, I sacka the whole staff !

[*Goes out. The outer door slams.*]

DUCHESS (*going up*) : Gunning, for the third and last time—I go to bed.

[*GUNNING puts her crochet in her apron pocket and comes to the DUCHESS L. of bed and unhooks her dress. It falls to the floor. She steps over it.*]

GUNNING (*picking up the dress*) : I will say the Reverend Macadam didn't look that kind of man.

[*Disappears L. with dress.*]

DUCHESS : What kind of——Oh ! (*She begins to laugh.*)

GUNNING (*re-appearing*) : But I always suspect these gloomy ones—they've got something inside all right. (*Passing the nightdress over the Duchess's head while the other garment falls to the floor.*)

DUCHESS (*sitting on the bed*) : Poor Mr. Macadam—if he have anything inside it is in a refrigerator. (*Sticking out a leg.*)

GUNNING : What I say of the clergy is, when they are good they are very, very good, but when they are bad they are horrid.

DUCHESS : Gunning, why are you always so bitter about clergymen ?

GUNNING : In my younger days, your Highness, I was engaged to a sexton, but it's a long, long story.

DUCHESS : Well, you tell it to me to-morrow. I go straight in my bed—my feet are on fire and my head is on fire and my body between is just dead. (*She slips in between the bedclothes.*)

[GUNNING disappears L. for a moment with shoes, stockings, etc. then returns.

GUNNING : Is that all, your Highness ?

DUCHESS : All—good-night.

GUNNING : Good-night, your Highness. (*She goes in the front room.*)

DUCHESS : Oh, Gunning ! As you go by ask Colonel Menken to tell his Majesty I am gone to bed—I have a headache—I see him in the morning.

GUNNING : Yes, your Highness.

[*Going, she pauses at the switch by the door, turning out all lights in front room. She goes out.*

*A moment later the sound of the outer door closing. The DUCHESS lies still with closed eyes, trying to sleep, then suddenly sitting up she crumples and bangs the pillow to make it higher and goes down on her right side closing her eyes for another attempt. Then her arm goes up switching off the light above the bed.*

*For a few moments darkness and silence. Then the telephone bell rings in the front room. A deep sigh of despair from the dark. The bell rings again. The light above the bed is turned on. The DUCHESS sits up, very cross, then as the bell rings again stretches out for the instrument beside her bed.*

DUCHESS (*crossly*) : What is it ? . . . What ? . . . Who ? . . . Oh ! (*Her expression changes to a smile and she becomes alertly awake.*) But I am in bed ! . . . No, wait, I get up . . . in a minute . . . I leave open the outer door.

[*She jumps out of bed replacing the phone, puts on her slippers, then her dressing-gown, fastening it up. Opens the gold box on the table, beside the bed, quickly powders, gives a few deft touches to her hair, comes into the front room, switches on the lights, presses the button which closes the tapestries, goes out, leaves the outer door ajar, and returns closing the door, crosses R. and looks out cautiously between the window curtains.*

*The closing of the outer door is heard, then a knock.*  
Come in !

[CORCORAN enters, closes the door, and stands by it a little awkwardly—the aggressive domineering manner is toned down.

CORCORAN : I guess I'd no right to disturb you——

DUCHESS : Do not apologise—I tell you to come.

CORCORAN : That's right, then I won't. I've been figurin' things out since our talk here—there's a lot o' things weren't said, couldn't be said with the Reverend here—and I'm just wonderin' if you and I couldn't get together on it.

DUCHESS : You no need to wonder—we can. I take it that is why you are here. Will you not sit down, Senator ?

CORCORAN : Sure. (*He sits where he sat before, R. of table.*)

DUCHESS (*she sits on stool C.*) : Well ?

CORCORAN : Macadam won't budge——

DUCHESS : Oh ?

CORCORAN : I've talked at him till me throat's

sore—till I told him to go to—home, an' he went. He's a maniac.

DUCHESS (*nodding*) : Fanatic !

CORCORAN : You've said it. Well, when he'd gone, I began to see I'd got myself in a cleft stick, an' I don't see no way out.

DUCHESS : Shall I help you ?

CORCORAN : Can you ?

DUCHESS : Perhaps. You have something to say that is difficult to put in words, you don't know how—I say it for you. (*Holding out her clenched fist*) You have got us like that—we know it—if you do not squeeze us too hard we are willing to pay. It is a business ? How much—or what is it that you want ?

CORCORAN : Jees ! (*He bursts out laughing.*) So that's what you think I came for——Well, I guess it may sound funny to you, but I got all the money I want or near it—I didn't reckon to get a thing out o' this—yes, by God, *one* thing—but that's nothing to do with you.

DUCHESS : You are not very illuminating, Senator. If it was not that, what did you come for.

[*He looks at the ground smiling, and for a moment does not answer.*]

CORCORAN : I'll tell you—(*turning to her.*) When I'd put this over on you folks to-day I didn't feel too grand—you were good losers—you'd lost the game but you didn't lose your tempers or your manners. But when I sat here to-night I felt real mean. I've done this kinda thing a score o' times—'t ain't a parlour game sure, it's dirty——

DUCHESS (*puzzled*) : “ When you put this over ”—do you mean——?

CORCORAN : A frame-up—a plant. Yeah, I'll



say it was one of the smartest li'l frame-ups ever put across in God's own country, and I was darned proud of it—till to-night.

DUCHESS : And so when I said " *if* it was an accident "——?

CORCORAN : You said a mouthful. I knew how you were fixed—everything—I horned in on this floor a fortnight before you came—I had the Reverend all balled up about European immorality—an' we got you with the goods. There—I've "come clean" as the police say.

DUCHESS : Is "clean" quite the word——?

CORCORAN : I'll say you're right. (*Laughing.*)

DUCHESS : Why did you want to do this to us?

CORCORAN : I never thought of you—I'd hardly seen you. But I got oil lands in Mexico. Four years ago I took it to the International Oil crowd to exploit them—old Lee's a pirate sure, but he's white—I had the whole thing fixed up fair, when that yellow bastard, Montgomery Curtis, shoved his ugly nose in an' smashed the deal. Yes sir—and he hung on—he blocked me with the big five, blocked me with the banks, everywhere—for four years he's been trying to squeeze me out—(*with a laugh*) he's got a hope!—And then I saw the chance to bust the Pol-davian Oil deal—his deal—and by God I've busted it sure.

DUCHESS : Indeed ! (*Pause.*) But Senator, what you want is the blood of Montgomery Curtis.

CORCORAN : He ain't got no blood—soft soap and vinegar's what's in his veins. (*Leaning forward*) I'd spend my last cent—I mean it—if I could smash that white-livered skunk.

DUCHESS : That would be very nice, but it do not help us—what do *we* do?

CORCORAN : I'm beat !

DUCHESS : Could you take over the deal and put it through yourself?

CORCORAN (*shaking his head*) : Too big for me. I ain't a real oil man, just an amateur who struck lucky. Only the big fellers could handle this. You don't get me. I ain't looking for nothin'. I've done the dirty on you, an' I can't get clean. I'm caught. You said I'd got you like that. (*Holds out his clenched fist.*) That's how Macadam's got me. An' try to budge him—beatin' yer head against a stone wall. (*He rises.*) Here's what I came for—to tell you I want to let you out. (*He takes the agreement from his pocket as she rises.*) You can have that back. (*Gives it to her.*) And the curse of it is, it's worth dam' all to you. Good-night. I'll have another smack at the Reverend in the morning. (*He turns to go.*)

DUCHESS : Oh no—do not go—please. Perhaps we put our heads together and we find something, no?

CORCORAN (*turning*) : Sure—I'm in no hurry. But I thought mebbe you're wantin' to get back to bed.

DUCHESS : Oh, no, I can go to bed for years and years. Look, you sit once more, and I give you champagne and a caviare sandwich and we think together a little——

[*She goes to the Gothic cabinet for another glass. He goes back to his seat and sits when she comes over and fills the glass. Then, sitting opposite to him and filling her own glass :*

So—we think more comfortable like that.

CORCORAN (*laughing*) : I could do a lot of thinkin' like this.

DUCHESS (*raising her glass*) : And we drink to “the way out.” (*Holding out the plate*) A caviare? When they are born they are little Bolsheviks, but as Garcia say, they are very good now.

CORCORAN (*taking sandwich*) : Say—what do you think of me ?

DUCHESS : Do you care ?

CORCORAN : No ! Sure I care. But you give me caviare an' champagne—an' you should be givin' me hell.

DUCHESS : Perhaps you get hell for a savoury.

CORCORAN : An' I bet you could give it—with the lid off.

DUCHESS : Would you mind ?

CORCORAN : I'd eat it.

DUCHESS : What do you think ? If I go see the Reverend Macadam——

CORCORAN : He'd run a mile.

DUCHESS : That is not a compliment.

CORCORAN : Best compliment you can pay temptation.

DUCHESS (*laughing*) : Oh, no, there is a better.

CORCORAN : What ?

DUCHESS : Never mind.

[CORCORAN *suddenly sees it and laughs.*

Now we must think. (*She takes up the agreement, tapping the table with it.*) What way do we get the Reverend Macadam—money ?

CORCORAN (*shaking his head*) : Macadam's incorruptible—it'd cost too much.

DUCHESS : How you mean "cost too much" ?

CORCORAN (*laughing*) : Well, if you offered an archangel all the money in the world there's no tellin' what'd happen. But you haven't got it.

DUCHESS : How much ?

CORCORAN : You can cut it out—I've known him since I was a kid—money won't buy him.

DUCHESS : But what then ?

[*He shrugs his shoulders.*

(*She jumps up*) Oh, do not shrug ! You know like me if we do not find it we are as bad as before. Is there no way we stop his mouth ?

CORCORAN : Short o' shootin', none. (*With a grin*) Round here you can get a guy shot for a hundred dollars—but I don't advise it.

DUCHESS : That is absurd, of course ! (*She stands balancing the agreement on her fingers.*) There is one way, Senator.

CORCORAN : Which ?

DUCHESS : You have give me back this. If Macadam speak—you can say it never happen—he dream it when he sleep.

CORCORAN (*putting down his glass*) : See here, kid, get this. I lugged the Reverend into this mess ; if he's still set on seein' it through, I got to stand by him.

DUCHESS : You no do this for me ?

CORCORAN : I ain't double-crossin' a pal for anyone—get me ?

DUCHESS (*nodding*) : I get you.

CORCORAN : I'll rake hell to make him change his mind—I guess I can do no more.

[*She bends her head, then throws the agreement into her despatch-box, sits in the chair nearer him, and fills his glass and then her own.*]

DUCHESS : Senator, what make *you* change your mind ?

CORCORAN : Oh—I hardly know.

DUCHESS : You must know.

CORCORAN : I guess it wouldn't interest you.

DUCHESS : Oh, but very much.

CORCORAN : Well, it must 'a bin' watchin' you sittin' there on that stool with the pale pleadin' face fightin' for yer life, an' Macadam's jaws



clappin' on ye like an old Bible pressin' a violet—I just felt I was bein' a hog.

DUCHESS : Yes, a hog—but a nice hog ! (*Then laughing*) Only I do not have the pale pleading face, I feel no care a dam'.

CORCORAN : You didn't look it.

DUCHESS : Oh !

CORCORAN : Didn't rightly see you this morning—the hat—an' that first time——Gee ! I couldn't take my eyes off the King's golden pyjamas.

[*She leans back shaking with laughter in which he joins—then suddenly becoming serious—chasing something in his memory.*]

Golden ! Golden !

DUCHESS : What ?

CORCORAN : Sermon “golden”—(*leaning forward*).

DUCHESS : Sermon ?

CORCORAN : Two years ago, last time I heard him—“golden”—“cloths that veil the Glory of the Lord !” (*In growing excitement*) Preaching on Solomon's Temple in his little ten-cent church ?

DUCHESS : Macadam ?

CORCORAN (*excited*) : Sure !—an' mebbe it's the way out ! He'd been lettin' himself go on the grandeur an' the richness of the building, an' then he came to the holy of holies—purples and porphery and ivories an' silver an' precious stones an' “golden cloths that veiled the Glory”—an' then droppin' his voice—“My brethren, you could not duplicate that chamber to-day for four hundred thousand dollars.” (*Sitting close to her*) I remember thinkin'—“there's his dream” ! And wonderin' why he didn't make it half a million. An' for weeks I was expectin' to see the hat—it didn't come. But if International Oil'd build the Reverend Adam Bride Macadam

a million-dollar church—I kinda reckon he'd fall for it.

[*Slight pause.*]

DUCHESS : I see Lee in the morning—I tell him they must build the Reverend a church for a million.

CORCORAN : Make it two—temptation must be irresistible—(*turning*) like you.

DUCHESS : Am I ?

CORCORAN : Sure.

DUCHESS (*rises, laughing*) : Temptation must be irresistible both sides to be really good.

CORCORAN (*laughing*) : Sure. (*Rising*) Well, I guess that shows me where I get off.

DUCHESS : Oh no !—you are strong—you no need to run.

CORCORAN : Well, I needn't run a mile. (*Laughing, takes the bottle and pours the rest into their two glasses.*) We drank to the way out—we'll drink again to the golden pyjamas ! (*Raising his glass*) They let you in, and now mebbe they'll let you out.

[*They drain their glasses.*]

Say—(*looking round*)—this ain't the same room we came into—I bin tryin' to figure it—

DUCHESS (*who has gone up*) : No—it was like this. (*She presses the button, the tapestries slide back, she goes R. and sits on settee.*)

CORCORAN : Sure—that's it ! Golden bed, golden mirror, and golden pyjamas ! (*He laughs, crossing down to her.*) Gee ! some dazzle !—an' then I apologised—an' you got under the bedclothes—to hide your shame. (*Sits on the stool beside her.*)

DUCHESS : No, to hide my laughing.

[*They laugh.*]

I hope you are ashamed.

CORCORAN : I'm a hardened sinner—Gee !  
it's a pity you're married.

DUCHESS : Oh, I am very complicated !

CORCORAN : I wouldn't let you out of my sight.

DUCHESS : So !

CORCORAN : Runnin' wild around Hollywood.

DUCHESS : You read that ? (*He nods.*) Oh, a king  
belong to everybody. But he is very jealous.

CORCORAN : I'll say he is.

DUCHESS : Once at Zaoum he throw a major  
out of the first floor window.

CORCORAN : Gee !

DUCHESS : Oh, it is a compliment—but he break  
two legs—such a handsome man with a big  
moustache !

CORCORAN : An' we're on the second floor !  
(*Glancing at the window.*)

DUCHESS (*laughing*) : Senator, are you making  
——(*She stops.*) Oh, I cannot call you Senator—  
it sound like a long white beard with egg on it.

CORCORAN : I bin called plenty—but my  
friends call me Barney.

DUCHESS : Barney——

CORCORAN : Il-lonya—kinda got a thrill  
writin' it—but 'stoo long.

DUCHESS : Lonya.

CORCORAN : That's bully—Lonya. What were  
you goin' to say ?

DUCHESS : Oh, I could not say it now.

CORCORAN : Sure !

DUCHESS : Oh no. I could say (*primly*) “ Senator,  
are you making love to me ? ” but I could not  
say (*languishing*) “ Barney, are you making love  
to me ? ”

CORCORAN : I wouldn't dare—just tryin' to feel  
how strong I am.

DUCHESS : How strong ?

CORCORAN : I'll warn you——

[*The sound is heard of the outer door being opened with a key, and the KING's voice talking and laughing loudly with someone outside.*]

DUCHESS : *Krashtovida ! Toutou !* (*She springs up, glides across to the door, and locks it.*)

[*CORCORAN rises slowly, with a perplexed grin, looks round, then goes towards the window.*]

CORCORAN (*in a loud whisper*) : I'll slip to my rooms by the balcony.

DUCHESS (*running across*) : No—no—you get shot——(*He stops.*) The detective—out there—with a gun !

CORCORAN : Detective ?

DUCHESS : He shoota first and aska the question afterward.

CORCORAN : In here ! (*Crossing to bedroom.*)

DUCHESS : No good.

CORCORAN : The bathroom ?

DUCHESS : Worse. (*A loud laugh off. At sound she jumps back and collides with the man-at-arms R.*)

In here ! Quick ! (*Takes off helmet and puts it on stool.*)

CORCORAN : In there ? ! ! (*Then starts to get in.*)

DUCHESS : Yes, yes. It is no oncomfortable—I do it once in *Madame Navarre* !

CORCORAN : Well, it ain't the first time I've been canned.

DUCHESS : Do not move. (*Buckling the armour.*)

CORCORAN : Guess I can't.

[*Loud knocks.*]

KING : Lonya !

DUCHESS : Who is that ?

KING : Me—Toutou ! (*Shaking the door.*)



DUCHESS : I am gone to bed !

KING : Then get out of bed.

DUCHESS : I am gone to sleep. (*Getting on the stool with the helmet.*)

KING : I wake you up ! (*Knocking.*)

DUCHESS : Wait a minute. I put something on first.

[*Putting the helmet over CORCORAN's head, the vizor up. She puts her finger to her lips for silence, then lays it against his lips and shuts the vizor, skips down, replaces the stool, and staggers to the door, unfastening her dressing-gown, and opens the door with a stretch and a yawn.*]

*The KING enters. He is in evening dress, with orders, and though not in the least drunk, has dined very well, and is smoking a big cigar.*

DUCHESS : Why you wake me in my beauty sleep ?

KING : I am not at all sleepy. (*Shutting the door.*)

DUCHESS : I shall be a wreck in morning——

KING : We shall all be a wreck in the morning. (*With a big laugh.*)

DUCHESS : I send you a message I am gone to sleep and you do not consider me——

KING : I am come to consider you—you look very sweet.

DUCHESS : I am very cross, Toutou—and half asleep. What was the dinner like ?

KING : It was not a dinner—there are no words ! We eat everything forbidden by the doctors and drink everything forbidden by the law. We do not dine in a room, we dine in an oil field—painted round the walls. There are no waiters—oil-workers ! Even the ice-pudding is a derrick ! Everything is oil—so natural I think I taste paraffin in the soup.

[*He sits at the table, lays his cigar on the ash-tray, and begins eating the caviare sandwiches.*]

Caviare, good !—make me hongry once more.  
(*Seeing the two glasses.*) Who is drinking with you ?

DUCHESS : No one—I have a headache—I take aspro in this glass. (*Moving the glass away.*) Garcia bring me a bite of supper.

KING (*having tried to fill the other glass from the empty bottle*) : No wonder you have a headache.

DUCHESS : Well, I must try to forget. You have some whisky.

[*He nods, putting a sandwich in his mouth.*]

KING : No news ?

DUCHESS (*as she goes to cabinet R. back*) : I ask the Senator and Reverend Macadam to come to see me.

KING : Well ?

DUCHESS : No good—the Reverend will not move.

KING : And the other ?

DUCHESS : He cannot move.

KING : Would he if he could ?

DUCHESS : I think he might.

KING : What a pity—after the fish Lee say he buy my hunting forest and stock another for me.

DUCHESS : How much ? (*Having taken out syphon, whisky bottle, and glass.*)

KING : Ten million dollars.

DUCHESS (*coming L.*) : Perhaps another give you more.

[*As she passes the man-at-arms he touches her on the shoulder and his head nods. She nearly drops the bottle, but sails skilfully on, reaching the table as the KING takes the last sandwich and pours out a whisky.*]

KING : Nonsense ! What make you think that ?

DUCHESS : I get a hunch—as they say.

KING : If you find such a fool I give you the difference.

DUCHESS : It is a bet. (*Handing him the glass.*)

[*The KING drinks. As he finishes a convulsion shakes the armour with the sound of a half-smothered sneeze. She starts and then watches for the second.*]

KING : What was that ? (*Putting down the glass.*)

DUCHESS : Wind ! (*Seizing the whisky*) You have another ?

KING : No, no !

DUCHESS : Yes, yes ! It do you good. (*She sees the second convulsion, soundless, successfully smothered.*)

KING (*putting his glass away*) : American hospitality has gone the limit, but still I am sober. It is a record—do not spoil it. (*He rises laughing, and moving up R.C.*) But I feel good—my brain is working—I could do business now.

DUCHESS (*watching, as he goes straight towards the man-at-arms*) : You go to bed now—or you no good for business in the morning.

KING : No good ! (*Turning beside the man-at-arms*) You should have heard me ! (*Laughing*) I think I frighten Lee. I say, “ Those options—you get us too cheap ”—and always they fill our glasses, and always I am more sober, and always he is not——

DUCHESS : Well, perhaps something happen before to-morrow—go to bed.

KING : Those two rascals ! If only I had felt this morning like now ! I was too quiet, too tame, too polite. *Krashtovida* ! I make them ashamed !

DUCHESS : Will you go to bed !

KING : I flatten them out ! (*Shaking his finger at man-at-arms on the left*) You pretend to be a clergyman—you are a sneak—and you have a face like a cold potato ! (*Turning on the other*) As for you ! The noble Senator !

DUCHESS (*catching him*) : Toutou, will you go to bed now !

KING : Yes, yes, I go to bed. I stay here and go to bed. (*Putting his arm round her waist.*)

DUCHESS (*twisting out of his embrace*) : No, no, no ! You will not stay here.

KING (*coaxing*) : Lonya—

DUCHESS : No, no—you go away.

KING : Let me send for my pyjamas !

DUCHESS : We have too much of your pyjamas—all our troubles come out of your pyjamas. I am tired of your pyjamas.

KING : Lonya—I do not understand you.

DUCHESS : You understand me very well.

KING : I come to see you—here I am, here I stay.

DUCHESS : I do not want you—go away. I send you a message I am tired, I go to sleep—no, no, you come ! I beg you a dozen times you go to bed—no, no, you stay ! You cannot treat me so—I will not have it.

KING : But, Lonya—

DUCHESS : No—go back to Hollywood, to your beauties there—to the Spanish lady at New Orleans—to the baby blonde at Baltimore—to all the others whom I do not know. But not to me—I am done with you—I am at the end.

KING : I go, I go—but listen, Lonya—

DUCHESS : I do all the work, and no consideration ! (*Tearing off her dressing-gown and flinging it on the floor.*) From morning till night I am seeing people—I am discussing—I am giving the interviews—I make my speeches, I make yours. (*Kicking off a shoe which nearly hits him.*) I am arranging the programme—I am trying to find where you are when you are not there. (*Kicks off the other shoe.*) And now when I am tired to death I am not allowed to go to bed. (*Flinging herself*



*into bed.*) It is too much—it is too much—too much ! (*Pulling the clothes round her and snuggling into the pillows.*)

KING : Yes, yes, I know, but Lonya, listen——

DUCHESS (*sitting up with a jump*) : Listen; listen ! Always I listen, but what do I hear—nothing, nothing that help. Am I to get no peace when I am in my bed ? Even now I am making plans—thinking what I can do to save our negotiations—and all you say is listen, listen !

KING (*holding up his hands to ward off the flow*) : All right, all right, I go to bed—now. (*Going down*) Good-night, Lonya.

DUCHESS (*after a slight pause*) : Good-night. (*She turns off her light and drops back on pillows.*) . . . Draw the curtains . . . please.

[*He presses the button, and curtains slide together.*]

KING : Sleep well !

DUCHESS : I try my best.

[*He goes towards the door on his toes, opens it, and steals out, closing it after him.*]

*The laughing face of the DUCHESS appears among the Sabine women—with a convulsive jerk CORCORAN throws up the vizor of his helmet.*

CORCORAN : How in hell do I get out of this ?

DUCHESS (*laughing*) : I got you in—I get you out.

## CURTAIN

### ACT III

SCENE : *Same as Act I. The morning after the night before.*

*The DUCHESS is seated L. of desk. An agreement on a large single sheet lies before her. Miss CUTTING stands facing the desk with the counterpart in her hand, COUNT SEIDEL stands at the corner of the desk above the DUCHESS. The KING is standing in front of fireplace L. smoking a cigarette.*

DUCHESS : So—you need not retype it—it is only a draft agreement, they can initial it—you block out that line. (*Running her finger along it.*)

MISS CUTTING : Yes, your Highness.

DUCHESS (*to SEIDEL*) : And—what was the word ?

SEIDEL : Notwithstanding——

DUCHESS : And you type “not-with-standing” before there—(*Puts her finger on the spot as Miss CUTTING notes the word*) then bring it back for his Majesty’s signature.

MISS CUTTING (*taking it*) : Yes, your Highness.

DUCHESS (*sweetly*) : You will be quick ?

MISS CUTTING : I certainly will.

[*She is off R.*]

*The DUCHESS studies her plan of campaign, making notes in pencil. A few moments after the curtain rose ERASMUS has come in with a mug of beer and plate of little sandwiches which he places before the KING on the little table.*

KING : What is this ?

ERASMUS (*smiling*) : All what yo’ Majesty had yesterday—an’ more.

KING : I do not feel so good as yesterday—nor so hungry.

ERASMUS : Yo’ Majesty try—yo’ feel hungry all right.

KING (*takes up the mug laughing*) : I still have a good thirst—thank you, Erasmus. (*Takes a long drink.*)

[ERASMUS *bows smiling and goes out.*]

It is all something I cannot understand. Yesterday he is trying to ruin us—to-day he is buying my forest for eleven million dollars. Yesterday he is our worst enemy—to-day he is our best friend. How has this miracle been made?

DUCHESS : Only Count Seidel can tell—it is all his doing.

KING : And Count Seidel tell me it is all your doing.

SEIDEL : Your Majesty, that was merely her Highness's modesty—I only——

DUCHESS (*quickly*) : No, no, I have no modesty. Who was it find out yesterday Senator Corcoran have oil in Mexico?—Count Seidel ! Who was it put through this morning so cleverly the deal for the concession of the hunting forest?—(*Rising*) Count Seidel ! At eleven million—one million more than Lee offer you—one million for me, Toutou !

KING : What do you mean? one million for you?

DUCHESS : You forget ! You say, if you find a fool to give more you can have the difference, and I say it is a bet. You would not rob me of my paltry million?

KING : If I said it I said it.

DUCHESS (*to SEIDEL*) : You are a witness. (*To the KING*) Of course I am able to help a little. In the night I am thinking—long time I am awake, and many times I think good, and I think perhaps something come of it. But the one who do things is the Count ! (*With a magnificent gesture, then going to SEIDEL*) This morning I say to his Majesty, if to-day we shall

be saved we shall owe it to the Count—he must have an Embassy.

KING : Yes—I make changes, London and Paris—in our first negotiations we fall between two fools—which do you like ?

[MISS CUTTING *returns with the draft agreement.*

SEIDEL : London, your Majesty.

KING (*finishing the beer*) : I send you to London.

SEIDEL (*bowing*) : Your Majesty, I shall not attempt to put my gratitude into words——

DUCHESS : No, no, we have no time—Toutou, you must sign this. (*Going to the desk*) Quickly. (*She takes up a pen.*)

[*The KING sits at the desk, and signs.*

You will please give these to Captain Olven. His instructions are to give them to Senator Corcoran for signature—they must be signed before the conference—you understand ?

MISS CUTTING : Yes, your Highness.

DUCHESS : Thank you.

[*MISS CUTTING goes out R. with agreement.*

We have two fights before we are out of the wood. In a few minutes the Senator and Reverend Macadam are here to meet his Excellency——

KING : The Baron—Ho ! ho ! ho !—He will make a mess of it.

DUCHESS : No, no, I have rehearse him.

KING : That Baron ! I am wondering where I can send him.

DUCHESS (*nodding*) : Yes, we need an ambassador there some day.

[*KAMP comes on L.*

KAMP : Your Majesty, your Highness, Mr. Lee has arrived.



DUCHESS : Good ! Come along. (*Tapping the KING on the shoulder.*)

KING : No, I am not in the mood.

DUCHESS : But it is on you that I rely ! Do you forget what you do to him last night ?

KING : To-day my brain is not the same.

DUCHESS : Just the same, Toutou—your brain is like your sword—it is mostly in the scabbard, but though no one see it the point is always there.

[*The KING goes out.*

*As she is following she turns to KAMP.*

Your Excellency will remember ?

KAMP (*bowing*) : I remember everything, your Highness—I forget nothing.

[*She goes out followed by SEIDEL who closes the doors.*

KAMP stands for a moment trying to think—then, taking a paper from his pocket, reads a sentence, raises his head, repeats it soundlessly. Twice he does this.

*There is a knock. He shoves the paper in his pocket.*

KAMP : Come in !

OLVEN (*appearing at door R.*) : Senator Corcoran and the Reverend Adam Macadam by appointment.

KAMP : Bring them in.

[*OLVEN disappears.*

KAMP stands waiting. OLVEN shows in MACADAM and CORCORAN and retires.

KAMP : First, gentlemen, permit me to thank you for your courtesy—er—in acceding to my request—er—for an interview.

CORCORAN : Mr. Ambassador, I've told my reverend friend of our talk on the phone. He

was dead set against movin', but I guess I just collared him and brought him along.

MACADAM : I don't see the use, Mr. Ambassador, I am inflexibly committed to the stand I have taken.

KAMP (*indicating the sofa*) : If you would be good enough to sit down.

[MACADAM *sits in R. corner of sofa*, CORCORAN *on the stool below the desk*.

Mr. Macadam, Senator, I have asked you here to-day to make a last-minute appeal—er—to your generosity—your Christian feelings—to—to—er——

MACADAM (*sharply*) : To what ?

KAMP : To wipe the slate clean.

MACADAM : I dislike metaphor, but if you can't talk straight, I tell you your slate is so dirty that wiping won't clean it—it will only spread the dirt.

[*A moment's pause.*

We signed a solemn agreement here yesterday ; are you folks going to keep your part of it ?

KAMP : Mr. Macadam—er—that is the difficulty——

MACADAM (*rising*) : Then we needn't wait.

CORCORAN (*quietly*) : Sit down a minute, Mac. (*To KAMP*) What is the difficulty ?

KAMP : I need not remind you, gentlemen, of the power of the big business interests concerned—of the immense value—not only to our country but to the trade of the United——

MACADAM (*snapping*) : You need not. Come to the difficulty.

KAMP : The difficulty is precisely this—that we may not be permitted to keep this agreement——

MACADAM : Why ?

KAMP : I am not exaggerating when I say that the Department of State would be very gravely concerned if the Poldavian Oil deal were lost to America, or still worse diverted elsewhere—very gravely indeed——

MACADAM : That cannot affect the law.

KAMP : No ? Suppose the police decline to move ?

MACADAM : They must move.

KAMP : The police force, Mr. Macadam, is not an automatic machine. It is a very sensitive body—er—very susceptible to pressure from all sides—and particularly from above.

MACADAM : If the police decline to enforce the law——

KAMP : Speaking of law—have you considered that this agreement of yours comes very near to compounding a felony ?

CORCORAN : How so ?

KAMP : To conspiracy even—an attempt to interfere with the action of the very law to which you appeal ?

MACADAM (*turning to CORCORAN*) : Is this right ?

CORCORAN : It never struck me that way—but I guess I can see now the other guy might put it like that.

MACADAM (*rising*) : Very well then—if what you say is true, if American law can fail to protect the purity of American life, then we shall appeal to the people—to the mouthpiece of the people—to the Press. We shall make public the truth and the whole truth immediately.

KAMP : And if the newspapers decline to print it ? The big powers——

MACADAM (*scornfully waving him down*) : No, no, Mr. Ambassador, I know the Press of my country, better than you, and I thank heaven that

not yet have they forfeited their old independence, their love of justice and of truth ; and when a story like this one goes to every newspaper in the country, I tell you they will print it—every word—and no power big or little will stop them.

KAMP : You may be right——

MACADAM : I am most certainly right !

KAMP : But it comes down to this, Mr. Macadam—of your agreement nothing is left except your power to broadcast a scandal. You may consider that it is your duty to do so——

MACADAM : I *know* that it is !

KAMP : Well, I can only ask you to think it over carefully ; and then, if you are able to regard it in a somewhat different light, I am instructed to say that there is nothing within reason which the interests involved would not do to show their appreciation—any institution you are interested in—er—charities—er—er—endowment—on the most lavish scale——

MACADAM : Are you trying to offer me a bribe ?

CORCORAN : No, you've got him all wrong, Mac.

KAMP (*holding up his hands*) : Nothing could possibly be further from my thoughts.

MACADAM : Let us go.

CORCORAN : In a minute ! Mr. Ambassador—if my friend and I could have a few words in private——

KAMP : Certainly, Senator, I will leave you. If you should need me—— (*With a gesture L.*) For the present——

[*Bows and goes out L.*

MACADAM *follows him with his eye then turns on*  
CORCORAN.

MACADAM : Are you letting me down ?

CORCORAN : Did I ever let you down ?



MACADAM : No.

CORCORAN : 'Nough said !—But we got to watch our step, Mac. What he said about the police refusin' to act——

MACADAM : I don't believe it.

CORCORAN : The law is an ass—you believe that ?

MACADAM : Sometimes.

CORCORAN : An' the ass sometimes sleeps.

MACADAM : We must wake it.

CORCORAN : 'Tain't so easy to wake an animal that sleeps wi' one eye open. An' the State Department——

MACADAM : That is impossible !

CORCORAN : I'm *in* politics—an' take it from me, big business is there all the time. When the law an' the profits get on opposite sides—queer things happen.

MACADAM : Very well then, we make public the whole disgraceful business from beginning to end.

CORCORAN : We can do that—an' if we do, I stand by you. But I'm just wonderin' is it goin' to help us any ?

MACADAM : To do what is our plain duty—— ?

CORCORAN : I'm thinkin' maybe we won't look too good.

MACADAM : And the insult ! to treat me as a dirty grafter and offer me a bribe, to——

CORCORAN : No, Mac—you got him all wrong there.

MACADAM : Then what did he mean by appreciation and endowment and the rest ?

CORCORAN : Oh, he's a lousy talker—I know what he was gettin' at—he told me on the phone. Seems they've been hearin' what folks

is sayin' about your preachin' at Kansas City an' other towns—an' how you only got a little ten-cent store of a place, an' they got wonderin' if building a fine big church at Kansas City wouldn't do a bit o' good.

MACADAM : A great church ! (*Then sharply*) What do they know of my church and my preaching ?

CORCORAN : These guys know a hell o' a lot. Money talks but it listens too, and it hears most everything. It weren't so much a church neither—more of a temple like—two million dollars he mentioned——

MACADAM (*astounded*) : Two million—— ! (*Shutting his mouth with a snap*) It's a bribe—it's nothing more than a bribe in disguise——

CORCORAN : Talk sense, man !—where's the bribe ? It isn't for you——

MACADAM : Then what is it ?

CORCORAN : If they were to offer you four hundred thousand dollars—you would refuse it ?

MACADAM : Most certainly I would.

CORCORAN : With indignation ?

MACADAM : Yes, yes, certainly—with indignation.

CORCORAN : An' you would be right. If you fell for it you would not be the man I've known you for since we were kids. But they ain't offering you anything—no one ain't offerin' anyone anything. Only certain big American interests—world interests, who have the cause of humanity at heart—an' it's good business to have it—and who realise as well as you or I how big a part religion plays in that cause, are weighin' in their minds the possibility of givin' to the American people, in Kansas City, a great church—a wonder temple—at a cost of two million dollars.

MACADAM (*reflectively*) : If I could believe that their motives are right—— ! (*He sits on sofa.*)

CORCORAN : Sure their motives are right when it's a church they're givin'. Have you the right to deprive your countrymen of a blessin' at that price ? Think of Kansas City—Godless crowd most o' them—don't they need another church ?

MACADAM : Yes, yes, there is a great darkness there !—if only my conscience could approve—— !

CORCORAN : An' your conscience must approve ! (*Sitting beside him*) Mac, you an' me's men o' the world—leastways me o' this world an' you o' the next. Take your conscience—what is the choice ? On one side the great temple where you can gather the good harvest—on the other a dirty little scandal that you've nosed out to fling to paper scavengers who feed it to their readin' millions ravening for pornographic dirt. You were crackin' up the Press just now—do you approve o' that end of it ?

MACADAM (*fiercely*) : No, no, no, I abominate it !

CORCORAN : An' the publicity—d'ye think I want to see my friend the Reverend Adam B. Macadam standin' on top o' the world washin' other people's dirty linen ?

MACADAM : I shrink from all that—I shrink from it !

CORCORAN : You're a minister of the Gospel, not a muck-raker—your grand voice should be trumpetin' spiritual truth through the aisles of a mighty temple, not whisperin' dirty stories through paper columns at street corners an' speakeasies——

MACADAM (*rising*) : No, you're right, you're right—every time you're right. I must walk warily, lest I fall in the pit I have digged——

CORCORAN : You'd be in it to your neck !

MACADAM : One can't touch pitch without being defiled.

CORCORAN : Smeared from head to foot you'd be—mixed up with a story o' this kind !

MACADAM : After all, who am I to cast the first stone ?

CORCORAN : No, lay the first stone, and let the temple rise on it !

MACADAM : I must think it over.

CORCORAN : Sure—an' keep on thinkin' o' the good you can do there in Kansas City—an' God knows they need it !

MACADAM : I will, I will. I must be alone—I must wrestle with this.

CORCORAN : Sure !

MACADAM : For the present—I leave everything in your hands. (*Putting a hand on his shoulder*) I trust you—to do what is right.

CORCORAN : I'll fix it—never fear.

MACADAM (*rubbing his chin*) : I think—I think I'll leave you to see him alone—I think I'd better go now.

CORCORAN : Sure ! (*Going R.*) You go 'way back and wrestle—see me at the hotel—three o'clock.

MACADAM (*moving slowly*) Two millions—— (*He stops.*) Would it be necessary—would it be seemly to spend the whole sum on the building ?

CORCORAN (*turning*) : Sure not ! Ostentation—throwin' money away. 'Course there'd have to be a fine presbytery for you to live in—an' a maintenance fund—an' you in control——

MACADAM : And—would a committee be necessary ?

CORCORAN : Committee—hell no ! An' then there's the boys—Rob's doin' well in the drug store, but Amos, he's studyin' for the ministry—it'd have to be a hereditary job——



MACADAM : Yes, yes, that's a good thought.

CORCORAN : I can put you wise how it could all be worked legitimate—square and above board—— (*Going*) There'd be a good rake off both here and hereafter.

MACADAM (*following*) : I'm glad of that thought about Amos.

CORCORAN (*opening the door*) : Some kid Amos ! (*As MACADAM passes out*) Think it over, Mac—wrestle it out—an' I'll be waitin for you at three.

[*The door closes on them.*]

*For a moment the stage is empty. Then COUNT SEIDEL appears strolling past the window L. back, evidently prospecting. He comes quickly to the centre window which is open, looks in, then turns and calls L.*

SEIDEL : Your Highness !

[*A moment later the DUCHESS is seen passing the window L.C.*]

They've both gone.

[*DUCHESS entering C.*]

DUCHESS : Gone ! (*For a moment she stands dismayed.*) No, no, it is not possible he fail. He is too persuasive—no clergyman could resist him ! The fight is over—but why have he gone ?

SEIDEL (*taking up the phone*) : Miss Cutting, have those two gentlemen gone ?—Senator Corcoran and the—— (*A pause, then to the DUCHESS*) The Reverend Macadam has just left—the Senator is with Captain Olven signing the Concession.

DUCHESS (*dropping on the stool below the desk*) : Good ! We know in a minute.

SEIDEL (*to the phone*) : The agreements are ready ? (*Pause.*) Bring them in. (*He hangs up the receiver.*) Your Highness, may I take this opportunity of thanking you——

DUCHESS : For what ?

SEIDEL : For the prospect of London——

DUCHESS : Oh that ! it is no more than you deserve.

SEIDEL : But I really did nothing.

DUCHESS : Count, if you say that again I am very angry ! You have been brilliantly clever—you will please think so always—and say so when possible.

[MISS CUTTING comes on with two bulky documents, which she places on the desk.

SEIDEL (*laughing*) : Well, of course I *am* brilliantly clever——

DUCHESS : Thank you—I quite agree.

SEIDEL : Thank you. (*To MISS CUTTING. She goes to the door.*) And there is what I trust will crown my brilliant work.

[MISS CUTTING opens the door, then stands aside to let CORCORAN enter—and goes out.

DUCHESS : Well ?

CORCORAN : He's thinkin' it over.

DUCHESS (*rising*) : Thinking it over !

CORCORAN : Gone to his hotel to wrestle till three o'clock.

SEIDEL : And signed nothing ?

CORCORAN : Not a thing—if he'd seen it in black and white he'd 'a run like a rabbit. Don't you worry—he's O.K.

SEIDEL : But suppose he repents ?

CORCORAN : He won't—you can repent in hundreds—you can repent in thousands—but when it comes to millions you're in a higher moral sphere.

DUCHESS (*laughing, sits on stool C.*) : Poor Mr. Macadam ! Almost I could be sorry—I thought his conscience was a rock.

CORCORAN : Sure it's a rock—with holes in it. It'll last him longer for a good gold fillin'.

[*The doors L. open and the KING comes in with MILTON LEE.*

KING : Yes, yes, a Hollywood in Poldavia—you must find the capital—we have everything else. Beautiful scenery, beautiful girls—it is a national necessity. (*He sits L. on sofa.*)

DUCHESS : Mr. Lee, I think you have had the pleasure of meeting Senator Corcoran?

LEE : Sure, Duchess.

CORCORAN : The pleasure was mutual.

LEE : Four years ago—a Mexican oil field, I remember.

CORCORAN : I remember a lot more'n that. And I'm still holding the oil field——

LEE : Is that so? And I gather you're now tryin' to horn in on this deal, Senator?

CORCORAN : If there is a deal—I'll sure be there.

LEE (*laughs*) : I guess our Vice-President'll have somethin' to say about that. (*Sitting*) He's just readin' that remarkable document of yours.

CORCORAN (*sitting L. of table R.*) : I'll be interested to hear him.

[MONTGOMERY CURTIS comes on, followed by the AMBASSADOR, who goes down to the fireplace. CURTIS, who is boiling with suppressed rage, carries open in his hand the counterpart of CORCORAN's agreement.

DUCHESS (*with a mischievous smile*) : Mr. Curtis, may I introduce to you Senator Corcoran.

CURTIS : Thank you, we have met.

CORCORAN (*smiling*) : Sure, an' we meet again.

DUCHESS : Will you not sit down, Mr. Curtis?

CURTIS : Thank you, I prefer to stand. (*Holding out the paper*) Your Majesty, Mr. Ambassador, this is nothing but a common hold-up——

CORCORAN (*grinning*) : Say an *uncommon* hold-up, Curtis.

CURTIS (*ignoring him*) : If your Majesty had sent this to us yesterday instead of signing it, I'd have got the State Department moving inside half an hour.

CORCORAN : And then ?

CURTIS : And put you where you belong—you and your Reverend fellow crook.

CORCORAN : Cut that out, Curtis—— (*Growling.*)

CURTIS : You'd have been under indictment before you——

CORCORAN (*laughing*) : Try an' get it ! You ain't got nothing on me, Curtis—no one's got a thing on me !

DUCHESS : Then, Senator, you must be either very good or very careful.

CORCORAN : I guess I might be both, your Highness.

DUCHESS (*laughing*) : I did not think of that.

CURTIS (*shaking the paper at him*) : This is a criminal act—I can send this to the Attorney-General and——

CORCORAN (*springing up*) : An' would you like to produce that document in court ?

CURTIS : No—there are obvious reasons why——

CORCORAN (*sitting*) : Exactly.

LEE : Is this a conference or a dog fight ? Your Highness, I guess I must apologise for——

DUCHESS : Oh, but I adore a dog fight, when the dogs are men !

KING : Or the men are dogs. (*Laughing.*)

CORCORAN : Mr. Lee, are we doin' business or are we not ?

LEE : What are your terms ?



CURTIS (*exploding*) : Lee, are you going to stand for this—are you going to allow your company to be held up by a couple of blackmailers ?

CORCORAN (*rising*) : Take that back, you——

CURTIS (*shouting him down*) : Blackmailer—the worst sort that blackmails a woman.

CORCORAN (*about to go for him*) : You lousy son of a —— !

DUCHESS : Senator ! (*Springing up with outstretched hands—then quietly*) Mr. Curtis, that is not true.

[*While the two men stand glaring at each other, she leans over the desk and takes from the green despatch-box the other half of the agreement which she opens and hands to Curtis.*]

Yesterday evening Senator Corcoran return to me the agreement we have signed.

CORCORAN (*to CURTIS*) : When you an' your crook-lawyer broke my Mexican contract I could have fought you an' won, but fightin' your kind costs more'n it's worth. I ain't blackmailin' no one—I waited four years to get you where I want you, and I guess you're there now. (*Sits.*)

LEE : As we seem to have reached a comparative calm perhaps the Senator can proceed to state his terms.

CORCORAN : Sure. First the Mexican deal—contract as before.

LEE : Well, we signed it once—there ain't much damage in that.

CORCORAN : Second—a seat on the board.

CURTIS : Then I resign !

[*LEE turns to him.*]

DUCHESS : Mr. Curtis, you cannot resign—it is from your brain and energy that the Poldavian Oil deal is born. You must stay to help it grow

up. Besides I know that you will *want* the Senator on the board—this morning he have bought the concession of his Majesty's hunting forest.

LEE (*jumping up*) : The what ? Your Majesty, I offered you ten million dollars for that concession at dinner last night.

KING (*spreading his arms*) : What can I do, my dear Mr. Lee, this morning the Senator give eleven.

LEE : When was this fixed up ?

CORCORAN : Last night——

DUCHESS (*correcting him*) : Yesterday evening, Senator—the preliminaries were discussed—the draft agreement was signed to-day.

[CORCORAN *taps his pocket where the agreement is.*

LEE : Say, Senator, I guess you ain't safe off the board. (*Sitting*) Anything more ?

CORCORAN : Third and lastly—the I.O.C. shall assign a fund of two million dollars for the building of a church in Kansas City——

CURTIS : A church !

LEE : What'n hell is that for ?

CORCORAN : For the conscience of the Reverend Adam Bride Macadam.

LEE : Gee ! Well, if there's nothin' else standin' between us an' completin' the Poldavian Oil deal—I'll say the church is a flea-bite.

DUCHESS (*rising with a sigh of relief*) : So at the last minute the moment have arrive—we sign ! (*She goes to the top of the desk, speaking as she passes to SEIDEL*) Everything is in order, Count ?

[SEIDEL *has already laid the two documents open on the desk.*

SEIDEL : Everything, your Highness. Mr. Lee, Mr. Curtis on this side, please. His Majesty there.

LEE (*as they rise*) : Guess your Majesty's been bored ?

KING : On the contrary—I hear spoken to-day for the first time the American language in its full purity.

LEE (*chuckling*) : We can do a hell of a lot better'n that, your Majesty. Oh boy !

[LEE and CURTIS sit on the long stool R. of desk, LEE next the audience, SEIDEL standing above CURTIS. The KING is in chair L. of desk, KAMP above him, the DUCHESS standing at top of desk, CORCORAN to the right above the round table.

DUCHESS : Your Majesty, gentlemen—we have incorporated the terms as laid down by Senator Corcoran in a rider—the agreements are made contingent on this——

[SEIDEL bends, pointing it out to LEE and CURTIS, KAMP to the KING. Over the bent heads as they read, the DUCHESS and CORCORAN stand smiling at each other. Through the doorway the cackling of the guests can be heard and just above it the voice of the USHER.

USHER (*off*) : The Portuguese minister and Madame ——

[*The name is lost.*

LEE : Guess that's O.K.

[CURTIS, LEE having signed and blotted, hands contract to DUCHESS ; on the other side KAMP hands his to LEE, after the KING has signed.

DUCHESS : A new page in the history of Poldavia.

CURTIS : The page of prosperity.

KING : And peace.

DUCHESS : Peace with honour.

KING : We hope so.

DUCHESS : Mr. Lee, Senator, you will settle your agreement in detail to-day ?

LEE : O.K. with me.

CORCORAN : Sure.

*[The double doors open, and the BARONESS enters as the voice of the USHER is heard announcing :*

USHER : His Excellency the German Ambassador and Frau von —

BARONESS : Your Majesty, your Highness, the President will be here at any moment—I hope I don't intrude——

KING : No, no, Baroness—now at last everything is O.K. ! Ho ! ho ! ho !

DUCHESS : His Majesty will join you in a moment, Baroness.

*[LEE and CURTIS go out with SEIDEL, the BARONESS following with the AMBASSADOR.]*

BARONESS : Our guests are most all here.

USHER : General and Mrs. Platt, Miss Platt.

DUCHESS : Your Majesty, you cannot go without some recognition of what Senator Corcoran has done for you.

KING : What has he done ?

DUCHESS : I could not put it into words, but without him the Poldavian Oil deal would have crashed.

KING : At our last meeting, Senator, you were out to destroy the Poldavian Oil deal—who has changed your mind ?

CORCORAN : I guess it was Count Seidel, your Majesty.

KING : A remarkable man !

DUCHESS : Oh ! a modern Metternich.

CORCORAN : He didn't say much, but the intellect, the feeling behind his words—I saw that your Majesty's interest and mine were the same. *(With a bow.)*

DUCHESS : And from that moment the Senator



is at our side. I suggest your Majesty bestow on him an order——

KING : An order ? So !

DUCHESS : The order of the “ Faithful Companions.”

KING : Hm ! Second class.

DUCHESS : First class.

KING : Second class. You have not twenty-six quarters ?

CORCORAN (*puzzled*) : I have nine million dollars.

KING : Not money. The first class is reserved for families of twenty-six quarterings.

CORCORAN : As an American citizen and a good democrat I could not accept a decoration, but I thank your Majesty for the offer—second class.

KING : And we thank you for all that you have done for us.

*[Shaking hands with him across the desk.]*

USHER (*off*) : Miss Mamie Hatch.

KING (*turning*) : I think the President must be here at any minute now——

DUCHESS : You go—I follow.

*[Exit KING. The DUCHESS takes from the despatch-box a casket.]*

Wait, I have something to give you—something to remember by. (*Giving him the casket*) No—do not open it—not yet. (*He lays it on the desk.*) Well, are you satisfied ?

CORCORAN : Sure—and you ?

DUCHESS : Sure. You ought to be.

CORCORAN : Ought I ?

DUCHESS : You get everything you want.

CORCORAN : But I can't keep it.

DUCHESS : Why not ?

CORCORAN : You are going away.

DUCHESS : That is the perfect ending—to go away.

USHER (*off*) : Rear Admiral Van Stutter—Miss Van Stetter.

CORCORAN : Hell ! To-morrow night you'll be on the *Aquitania*. When am I to see you again ?

DUCHESS : You have oil in Poldavia——

CORCORAN : Sure——

DUCHESS : I too might be there——(*Bending across the desk.*)

CORCORAN : So might I. (*Bending towards her.*)

[KAMP *entering*.

KAMP : Your Highness—the President.

DUCHESS : *Krashtovida ! ! !*

[*Exit with KAMP.*

CORCORAN *looks at the casket then opens it. There is a hush outside—someone is coming—he takes out an iron gauntlet with a card attached and reads :*

CORCORAN : “The velvet hand in the iron glove—a souvenir.” (*Looking up with a slow expanding smile*) Well, what d'ye know about that ?

USHER (*off*) : The President of the United States and Mrs. ——

[*The crash of the opening chord, as the orchestra in the farthest room breaks into “The Star Spangled Banner,” drowns the name still in the womb of history. He puts the glove in the box, tucks it under his arm, and hurries towards the doors.*

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E. M. Delafield

TO SEE OURSELVES

*A Domestic Comedy in Three Acts*

Applications to perform this play must be addressed to the author's agent, A. D. Peters, 4 & 5 Adam Street, Adelphi, London, W.C.2. No performance can take place unless a licence has been obtained.

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To  
~~MARGARET RHONDDA~~

*My Love*

---

## CHARACTERS

FREDDIE ALLERTON, owner of a paper-mill in  
South Devon.

CAROLINE ALLERTON, his wife.

JILL CHARTERIS, Caroline's sister.

OWEN LLEWELLYN, a visitor.

EMMA, the parlourmaid.

## SCENES

### ACT I

In Caroline's drawing-room.

### ACT II

SCENE I : Caroline's drawing-room, forty minutes  
later.

SCENE II : Caroline's bedroom, that night.

### ACT III

Caroline's drawing-room, three days later.

TIME : Early autumn, present day.



## ACT I

SCENE : *The drawing-room of the Allertons' small country house in South Devon. It is a very conventional room, with typical chintz-covered furniture, photographs in silver frames on occasional tables, vases of flowers, bad water-colour pictures on the walls, and so on. At the back of the stage is a long window, giving on to a porch, two steps above the level of the garden outside. Right of the stage is the fireplace, with mantelpiece and mirror above. Left centre, a sofa. Left, the door. There is also a cabinet-gramophone and telephone table in the room, and a grandfather clock in one corner.*

*Curtain goes up in silence at half-past five on an autumn afternoon. CAROLINE is knitting on the sofa, FREDDIE reading in an armchair near the fire. FRED-DIE is about forty-eight, inclining to baldness, also to stoutness. He gives a general impression of British phlegm, and is reading the "Morning Post." He wears the tweeds appropriate to a country gentleman at that time of year, and smokes a pipe. CAROLINE is some ten years younger than her husband, and does not make the most of her rather wistful prettiness. She wears the sloppy skirt and jumper of the English gentlewoman at home, and her hair is bobbed. She is knitting in a half-hearted fashion, looking across at her husband frequently. At last she speaks :*

CAROLINE : I'm not sure I'm not starting a cold, Freddie. (*Pauses for a reply which does not come.*) But perhaps I'm not. (*Pause as before.*) Jill and Owen are late, aren't they? (*Pauses for a reply which does not come.*) I must say, I should have thought they would have been back by this time. (*Similar pause, with same negative result.*) I can't help wondering if Jill is engaged to Owen, Or is that Victorian of me? (*Pause, and silence, as before.*) Of course, even ten years ago—in our day, Freddie—bringing a young man to spend a week with one's relations, and motoring about

with him all day long, *would* have meant an engagement, wouldn't it?

[*Pause. CAROLINE raises her voice.*

*Wouldn't it, Freddie?*

FREDDIE (*without looking up from the "Morning Post"*) : I daresay, dear.

CAROLINE : Or do you suppose that Jill and Owen are engaged and just haven't said so?

FREDDIE (*as before*) : No idea whatever.

CAROLINE : I suppose not. They're very late. They said they'd be back by five.

[*She gets up restlessly, goes to window and looks out, then moves across to the looking-glass and gazes at herself.*

Freddie, I sometimes think I'll grow my hair again.

[*Pause. FREDDIE reads on.*

Which do you think suits me best—long or like this?

FREDDIE : I don't know that I've ever thought about it, dear.

CAROLINE : It takes more than two years to grow properly, and the intermediate stages are awful, of course. But I think I looked younger when it was long.

[*Pause. Silence. CAROLINE raises her voice.*

*Didn't I, Freddie?*

FREDDIE (*without looking up from the "Morning Post"*) : Perhaps you did, dear.

CAROLINE : Don't you remember?

FREDDIE (*with sudden animation*) : These Labour fellows ought to be taken out and *shot*. What did you say, dear?

CAROLINE : It doesn't matter. (*Sits down again and resumes her knitting.*)

[*A long pause.*

(*Into the silence*) I wish I could hear of a housemaid. Even a temporary. (*Pause.*) But registry

offices are all so hopeless nowadays. (*Pause.*)  
Anything in the paper, Freddie?

FREDDIE (*still reading*) : Nothing whatever.

[*Silence as before.*]

CAROLINE : Sometimes I wish we had a wireless.  
(*Pause.*) Don't you think a wireless set *would* be  
rather nice, Freddie?

FREDDIE : I'm not keen.

CAROLINE : Why not?

FREDDIE : Oh, I don't know. For one thing, it  
rather puts a stop to conversation, doesn't it?

CAROLINE (*ironically*) : That *would* be a pity,  
wouldn't it?

[*After a momentary pause she repents of this, and  
cries out impulsively :*

Freddie, I'm sorry ! I didn't really mean that.

FREDDIE : What ? I'm sorry, dear, I'm afraid I  
wasn't paying attention.

CAROLINE : Weren't you ? Are you worried  
about anything ? What is it ?

FREDDIE : Not worth talking about.

CAROLINE : Oh ! Please tell me. Has something  
gone wrong at the mill ?

FREDDIE : No, no. Not yet.

CAROLINE : Is it the new manager ? I thought  
he was good.

FREDDIE : So he is. But it's bound to be a bit  
difficult, to get Devonshire men used to having  
a Welsh manager.

CAROLINE : Perhaps there'll be a strike.

FREDDIE : Might be.

CAROLINE : What's happened—how far have  
things gone ?

FREDDIE : The men have called a meeting for  
to-night. If there's real trouble, Williams will  
ring me up.

CAROLINE : There's never been a strike at the mill yet, has there ?

FREDDIE : Never. But with this dam' Labour Government, I suppose anything might happen.

CAROLINE : A strike would be terribly serious, of course. One's heard of such awful things—the men getting all worked up—and then completely out of hand——

*[As she works herself up with her own imaginings, FREDDIE, who at first has been looking at her, returns to his newspaper with a shrug. CAROLINE, her eyes dilating as she gazes on an imaginary scene that to her is real, goes on slowly speaking her thoughts aloud.]*

It might lead to anything, of course—rioting—or lynching—many an unpopular foreman has been thrown into his own furnace before now—— Fancy if the men came up *here* one night !—the roar of an angry mob outside——

*[The hoot of a motor-horn sounds outside the window.]*

Oh, what's that !

FREDDIE (*matter of factly*) : Jill and Owen, back at last, I suppose.

CAROLINE (*passing her hand over her eyes, as her visions are dispelled, and she gets back to earth*) : Oh, of course, Freddie ! Owen is, too !

FREDDIE : Owen is what, dear ?

CAROLINE : Welsh.

FREDDIE : Oh, yes ! I suppose he is. You needn't say anything about this mill trouble in front of them. They'll know quite soon enough.

CAROLINE : Then you do expect a strike ? Oh, Freddie !

FREDDIE : Nothing to get excited about, yet.

CAROLINE : All right, I won't. But Jill would be thrilled——

FREDDIE : I've just said——



CAROLINE : I know, I know. I won't say a word. I wonder if they've had tea. Anyway, it's too late now.

FREDDIE : I can ring for some more.

CAROLINE (*hastily*) : Oh, please don't ! I couldn't possibly ask Emma to get tea all over again, at this hour. She's rather unsettled, as it is . . . and, of course, we *are* short-handed until I can get a housemaid.

[*Enter JILL CHARTERIS. She is a tall, pretty girl of six- or seven-and-twenty, her modern poise, as well as her very distinctive style of dress, in sharp contrast to CAROLINE's general diffidence and uncertainty.*

OWEN, as his name denotes, is Welsh—an intelligent, muscular young man of twenty-nine or so, quite evidently in love with JILL.

JILL : Hello !

CAROLINE : Here you are at last.

JILL : Hello, Freddie.

FREDDIE : Hello, Jill.

CAROLINE : You've had tea, haven't you ?

JILL : No. Oh, we don't want any. (*Calls off R.*) You don't want any, do you, Owen ?

OWEN (*off R.*) : Any what ?

JILL : Tea !

OWEN : No, thanks.

JILL (*throwing herself into FREDDIE's chair*) : Lots of time to sit and talk before we need dress for dinner !

FREDDIE (*stupefied*) : Talk ! But you and Caroline were talking all day yesterday ! And after you went upstairs at night.

JILL (*carelessly*) : I daresay. Women are like that.

[*Enter OWEN.*

OWEN : Hello, Caroline.

CAROLINE : Hello, Owen.

FREDDIE : Would you care to see the *Morning Post* ?

JILL : Not a bit, thanks.

OWEN : I'll have a look at it later on, thanks.

FREDDIE : Then I think, perhaps, if you're all wanting to—er—*talk*—I'll finish the paper in the study.

[*Exit* FREDDIE.

JILL : Our conversational powers are wasted on Freddie, I'm afraid.

OWEN : Mine aren't. We stayed down here talking about paper-making till all hours last night.

CAROLINE : I know you did. It was past twelve o'clock when Freddie came upstairs.

JILL : I suppose that's nearly unheard-of. Oh, Caroline ! Do you mean that every evening, all the year round, you and Freddie sit here for a couple of hours after dinner, and Freddie goes to sleep over the paper, and you sit and think about the servants, and the weekly books, and the school-bills—and, on the stroke of ten, you go to bed ?

CAROLINE : But when people live in the country all the year round, Jill, things *are* like that. Especially as they get older.

JILL : For some people, perhaps, but not for you, darling. You used to have heaps of fun—I remember quite well—before I was grown-up.

CAROLINE : I know. But it's different, once one's married.

[JILL turns and looks at OWEN. He speaks quickly, as though in answer to the look.

OWEN : It needn't be. I beg your pardon, Caroline. I'm afraid that sounds like frightful cheek, but I wasn't speaking personally, of course, only carrying on an old argument with Jill.

JILL : “Never explain and never apologise,”

some wise one said. Let's all be thoroughly natural and honest for once, and say what we really think, even if it is uncivilised.

CAROLINE : Jill, darling, you don't realise——

JILL : It's all right—the children are at school, and the servants are in the kitchen, and the Mothers' Union will never know. Let's *talk*.

CAROLINE (*breaking into a sudden, excited laugh*) : All right ! It's simply marvellous to hear somebody say : “ Let's talk ”—and to know they're going to do it.

JILL : I'm going to do it all right. I've been dying to.

OWEN : Shall I clear out ? (*Rises.*)

CAROLINE : } No. (*simultaneously*)

JILL : } No. You've got to talk too.

[CAROLINE turns to OWEN. Her manner is changing already. She is more interested, more animated—in a word, more alive.]

CAROLINE : Oh, no, don't go.

JILL : Help me to encourage Caroline.

CAROLINE : I need encouraging—perhaps we all do. Why, all over this country, middle-aged, middle-class couples are doing and saying, day in and day out, just exactly what Freddie and I are doing and saying.

OWEN : Don't you ever get away—go up to London ?

CAROLINE : Sometimes, when I *can't* get a servant down here, I go up to Mrs. Hunt's Registry Office. And, of course, there are the boys' half-term holidays.

OWEN : But I mean for theatres, and concerts, and seeing your friends.

CAROLINE : Living down here, one gets out of touch with people, and there's the question of expense, too.

JILL : But it would be so awfully good for you, darling, to get away. It'd shake you out of your rut, and make you take an interest in your clothes, and your hair, and your appearance.

CAROLINE : But I do that now.

JILL : Oh. I didn't realise.

CAROLINE : I'd be almost ashamed to tell you what a lot of time I spend wishing that everything was quite different—that *I* was quite different.

JILL : But why don't you *do* something about it, instead of simply letting yourself go ?

CAROLINE : But even if I could afford to spend money, and time, and trouble, over my looks, what on earth would be the use, down here ? There's nobody to see.

JILL : One more reason why you *must* get away, as Owen says.

OWEN : It's rather cheek for me to say anything at all, I'm afraid. But Jill's right. You ought to get lots more fun out of life while you're still young. Why not go abroad ?

CAROLINE : Freddie can't bear foreign cooking.

JILL : Go without him.

CAROLINE : Oh, you don't understand ! It's so easy to say, " Go without him "—but Freddie and I aren't a modern couple. He's late Victorian and I'm early Edwardian. He still believes that husbands and wives go everywhere together. Every summer we take the boys to the east coast.

JILL : And you do the housekeeping in rooms, instead of in your own home, and Freddie grumbles because the landlady won't do any cooking at night. I know ! And you're both counting the hours till you can get home again.

CAROLINE : Don't, Jill——



JILL (*relentlessly*) : And all the time you might be tramping in Italy—or looking at the Alhambra by moonlight, far away in the south of Spain.

OWEN : Ah ! The Alhambra by moonlight !

JILL : Standing out against a dark Spanish sky.

CAROLINE : You forget the children. And do you think Freddie would really care about the Alhambra by moonlight ?

JILL : What *does* he care about ?

CAROLINE : Oh, the mill—and me and the children—and he likes his game of golf.

JILL : I see.

CAROLINE (*defiantly*) : After all, Freddie's people have lived here in Devon, and owned the paper-mill, for generations. This kind of life is in his blood. Owen, *you* understand. I suppose your people have always lived in Wales.

OWEN (*slowly*) : Yes. My father had a bit of a struggle after the War, but he keeps the place going somehow. There have always been Llewellyns there.

CAROLINE : Let's hope there always will be.

OWEN : Well—I wonder.

JILL (*to CAROLINE*) : You know Owen's the only son ? His father wants him to give up the City and live at home now, and manage the property.

[*As she speaks, her gaze turns away from CAROLINE to OWEN, and it is evident that it is to him that she is really addressing her remarks.*]

So in ten years' time, I suppose, *he'll* have settled into his rut, too, with a wife and children—and probably golf will interest him a good deal more than—the Alhambra by moonlight.

OWEN : Jill !

JILL (*defiantly*) : I expect it's true.

OWEN : I've told you a hundred times——

JILL (*interrupting*) : Oh, I know, I know. But

domesticity, and the English countryside, will be too strong for you, my dear. You'll get just like Fr—— (*Breaks off, and ends lamely*) Like anybody else.

OWEN (*too angry for coherence*) : Everybody isn't exactly like—anybody else.

JILL : That's what people always say, only they usually express it rather better.

CAROLINE : Are you two quarrelling ?

JILL : Probably. I always was quarrelsome. Don't you remember how you and I used to squabble ?

CAROLINE : Yes, I do !

JILL : Do you ever quarrel with anybody now, Caroline ?

CAROLINE (*slowly*) : Never. Not once—in ten years.

JILL : You poor darling.

OWEN : Do women enjoy quarrelling ?

JILL : They don't like never having a chance of making it up again—naturally. If more husbands understood that, there would be fewer unsuccessful marriages.

OWEN (*mockingly*) : “ Gillian Isobel Charteris on Marriage.”

JILL : It's only common sense to study a career before you decide whether you're going to embark upon it or not. *I'm* not going to be one of those women who make a hobby of being unhappily married.

OWEN : No, *you'll* go on being analytical, and modern, and open-minded, and critical, till you're incapable of plain, honest-to-God happiness !

JILL : Happiness—yes. I suppose that is what we're all after ?

CAROLINE : I don't believe it's true that a happy marriage has no history.

JILL : Much more likely that a happy history has no marriage.

OWEN : Horribly cheap, Jill.

JILL : Well, perhaps. But true, on the whole. Now take Caroline. If only she could have an affair—(*the door-handle turns, and they all three look round*)—with another man——

[*The PARLOURMAID enters.*]

CAROLINE (*to JILL*) : *Attention. Pas maintenant !—*Yes, Emma ?

EMMA : If you please, madam, the fish is here, and would like to speak to you a moment.

CAROLINE : Oh, dear ! Yes, I must go. (*To JILL*) I am so sorry. (*Rising and collecting knitting.*)

JILL : Would you like to ask the fish in here—shall we clear out ?

CAROLINE : No, no, of course not. I shan't be long.

[*Exit CAROLINE.*]

OWEN : The fish—my God !

JILL : It's like that all the time. Put on the gramophone, and let's dance.

[*OWEN opens the gramophone and selects a record.*]

*This proves to be a slightly out-of-date fox-trot.*

*They dance to it in silence for a moment or two.*

Oh, I can't dance to that. It's as old as the hills, isn't it ? (*Leaves OWEN and goes and switches off gramophone.*)

OWEN : Dates right back from last year, I should think. They haven't got anything new in dance records.

JILL : Why should they have ? I can't see Caroline and Freddie jazzing together through the long winter evenings, can you ?

OWEN : Good God, no !

JILL : Caroline used to adore dancing. But she's let it go, like everything else.

OWEN : Oh, my Jill ! (*Kisses her.*) What's been the matter with you all day ?

JILL (*sadly*) : You know. I can't marry you, Owen.

OWEN : Haven't you *any* courage ?

JILL (*promptly*) : No. Not after staying for a week with a happily-married couple.

OWEN (*sitting on the sofa, JILL leaning her head against his arm*) : To begin with, you and I are not Freddie and Caroline. And, to go on with, they're not exactly happily married, are they ?

JILL : Yes, but they *are*, my dear ! That's what's so devastating. At least, Freddie is quite happily married, though I'll admit I'm not sure that Caroline is.

OWEN : And I'm dam' sure she isn't. She knows it, too—anyway, subconsciously.

JILL : Caroline's subconscious self must be rather interesting, from a psycho-analytic point of view. She seems to me to have all the repressions, and inhibitions, and things, of the people who grew up before the War.

OWEN : Well, if it saved us from all that, then thank God for the War. No one can say that you and I are bothered with repressions.

JILL : We haven't got repressions, but I think—I'm not certain, but I *think*—I've got an inhibition somewhere.

OWEN (*concerned*) : Not sex, darling ?

JILL : Oh, *no*. Marriage.

OWEN : If you really cared, Jill, you wouldn't be afraid of marrying me.

JILL : Don't you see that it's just *because* I really care that I won't run the risk ?

OWEN : What risk ?



JILL : The risk that, in a year or two's time, we shan't—either of us—want to go and look at the Alhambra by moonlight any more.

OWEN : If anyone but you had said that, I should call it rank sentimentalism. Practically Victorian.

JILL : You know I'm not sentimental, Owen, *or* Victorian. Though I'm afraid I may be romantic—most women are.

OWEN : I see. Then if you won't marry me, will you be indefinitely engaged to me ?

JILL (*straightening herself and becoming flippant again*) : That sounds to me like an announcement of strictly dishonourable intentions.

OWEN : Well, you've turned down the alternative, haven't you ?

JILL : My refusal was meant to include an engagement as well as a wedding.

OWEN : What on earth is one to do with you ? (*Pause.*) Look here. You say you can't face marriage and domestic life. But you agree with me that you and I can't do without one another, don't you ?

JILL : Yes, I do.

OWEN : Then there's only one thing for it.

JILL : No.

OWEN : Darling, you must.

JILL : Become your mistress ? I don't think that's a terribly good idea.

OWEN : I was afraid perhaps you mightn't.

JILL : It might have been all very well for Freddie's generation, perhaps. They always made their gestures so frightfully well : " Married in the sight of all but God " didn't they call that sort of thing ?—when they did it themselves, I mean.

OWEN : I don't somehow think you're quoting correctly.

JILL : Perhaps not. But, anyway, if you and I did anything like that, people would simply say we were trying to economise or something. Besides, I always think it's rather a suburban way of doing things.

OWEN : Why suburban ?

JILL : Well—neither one thing nor the other. And illicit relations generally end in tears and suit-cases.

OWEN : Then if you won't marry me, and won't do the other thing—and we're agreed we don't want to give one another up—what *are* we going to do ?

JILL (*hopelessly*) : I don't know.

OWEN : But, darling, before we came here you'd practically promised to be engaged to me.

JILL : I know I had. But—(*gazing round the room*)—if *this* is marriage——

OWEN : Damn Freddie Allerton !

JILL : Freddie and Caroline are only an example of the average husband and wife. I notice it more because Caroline happens to be my sister, that's all. If she wasn't, I should simply take her for granted, as a wife and mother always does get taken for granted by everyone—and most of all by her husband.

OWEN : I don't think Caroline is the sort of person one takes for granted, quite. She's intelligent, you know, and sensitive and imaginative.

JILL : That's the tragedy of it. Owen, tell me something : could you ever, possibly, have fallen in love with Caroline ?

OWEN : Speaking—of course—quite impersonally ?

JILL : Of course.

OWEN : In a modern, detached, and analytical spirit ?

JILL : Quite.

OWEN : And assuming that either she belonged to my generation, or I to hers ?

JILL : Certainly, if you like.

OWEN : Well—then—I should say yes. Looking at it entirely as an abstract question, you understand.

JILL : Entirely.

OWEN : But, of course, the possibility of falling in love is always latent between every normally healthy man and woman. That's a biological fact.

JILL : What an unpleasant thought ! I know I shall remember that next time someone begins to make love to me, and I'm feeling gratified about it.—A biological fact !

OWEN : That's all. Just propinquity does it, as a rule.

JILL : You may fall in love with Caroline, if you like.

OWEN : Thanks very much.

JILL : I don't exactly mean *really*—but just a little bit, to take her mind off the fish, and Freddie, and so on.

[*Re-enter CAROLINE, now in a rather passée black evening dress, obviously "every evening" wear, and out of date.*

Dressed already ? Is it time ? (*Rises, as does OWEN.*)

CAROLINE : I went up when I'd done with the fish, so as to get back to the fire. I'm starting a cold, I know. (*The gong sounds.*) There's the dressing gong now.

OWEN : Jill, I'll race you upstairs for the first bath before dinner.

[*Exeunt OWEN and JILL. JILL snatches up her coat, bag, etc., as she goes.*

CAROLINE : Oh, I *hope* the water's hot !

[CAROLINE *calls out nervously* :

Oh—er—Emma ! (*Louder*) Emma !

[*Gong stops.*

*Enter EMMA.*

EMMA : Yes, madam ?

CAROLINE : Miss Jill and Mr. Llewellyn are having a bath—a—a bath *each*—before dinner. Just ask cook to stoke up the fire a little, if it isn't too much trouble, so as to make sure the water's hot.

EMMA : Very good, madam. (*Exit.*)

[CAROLINE *returns slowly into the middle of the room, and looks at herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece thoughtfully, shaking her head the while in dissatisfaction at her own appearance. As she turns away, FREDDIE comes in through the door. He goes up to the grandfather clock, looks at it, compares it with his watch, alters the latter, and prepares to go out again without a word.*

CAROLINE : Freddie !

[FREDDIE *looks round at her, surprised.*

Did you want me ?

FREDDIE : No, dear, why should I ?

[FREDDIE *goes towards the door, with the obvious intention of departing.*

CAROLINE : Are you in a great hurry ?

FREDDIE : It's just dressing-time, that's all.

CAROLINE : The gong's only just sounded. Freddie, do you know, I'm practically certain that Owen *does* want to marry Jill.

FREDDIE (*advancing slowly into the room*) : I dare-say.

CAROLINE : Anyway, he's in love with her.

FREDDIE (*pre-occupied*) : Is he ? (*He has taken out his pouch and is preparing to fill his pipe.*)



CAROLINE : He's terribly attractive. I expect Jill is too, to men. Freddie—do *you* feel it ?

FREDDIE : Feel what ?

CAROLINE : Jill's magnetism—sex appeal—whatever you like to call it.

FREDDIE : I really don't know what on earth you're talking about, dear. How's your cold ?

CAROLINE : It's coming on, I am afraid. Freddie, you like Owen, don't you ?

FREDDIE : He's all right.

CAROLINE : Not more than that ?

FREDDIE : Men are not always thinking whether they *like* people or not.

CAROLINE : I suppose not. After all, the question is whether Jill likes him.

FREDDIE : Well, it's about time she settled down, isn't it ?

CAROLINE : But that's just what she doesn't want to do ! She says that, once people have settled down, there's an end to—the Alhambra by moonlight, and everything.

FREDDIE : To the *what*, dear ?

CAROLINE : Seeing those two has made me rather foolish, that's all. Jill seems so—so free and independent, to me. She hasn't got to worry about servants, or housekeeping, or children, or anything. She can do anything she pleases—even take a lover, if she wants to !

[*This arrests FREDDIE in the act of lighting his pipe.*]

FREDDIE : Why not go and lie down for a bit before dinner ?

CAROLINE : I'm all right. Freddie, do you remember when we were first engaged ?

FREDDIE (*taking this literally*) : I think so. Some time in 1920—or was it the year after ?

CAROLINE : April 1920. I—I suppose I've changed a good deal since then ?

FREDDIE : I suppose we've both of us grown a bit *older*, if it comes to that.

CAROLINE : Do you still think me at *all* pretty ?

FREDDIE (*rising*) : What on earth's the matter with you to-night, old girl ? I'm sure you're not feeling well.

CAROLINE : But *do* you ?

FREDDIE : I've never thought about it.

CAROLINE (*desperately*) : Think about it now !

[FREDDIE *turns to look at her, disapproval in his expression—and, indeed, CAROLINE'S tragic intensity is not calculated to excite admiration.*

FREDDIE : This is all great nonsense. You look just as nice as any other woman—of your age, I mean. Though I must say I wish you'd keep your hair tidier.

CAROLINE (*recklessly*) : I'll grow it again !

FREDDIE : Oh, I shouldn't bother to do that. Now, dear, it's quite time we went up to dress.

CAROLINE : But I am dressed.

FREDDIE : Why, so you are. I never noticed. Well, I must hurry.

CAROLINE (*springing up after him*) : Freddie—I know you'll think me idiotic—but—say you love me !

FREDDIE (*kind, but awkward, and slightly annoyed*) : Shouldn't have married you if I didn't, should I ? (*He pats her face hurriedly*) There, is that what you want ?

CAROLINE (*dropping her hold of him*) : Women want such unlikely things—romance, and adventure, and excitement—but what's the use ? I know you care for me really, Freddie, even if you don't say a—a great deal about it. You do, don't you ?

FREDDIE : Yes, yes, dear ; don't be silly. Surely I've got enough to worry me, with a possible

strike threatening, and this dam' Labour Government in. You'll make me late for dinner. I don't know what's the matter with you to-night.

CAROLINE : Nothing that hasn't been the matter for years, only you've never noticed it. You—you don't take much notice of me anyway, do you, Freddie ?

FREDDIE : Why on earth *should* I take any notice of you, dear ? You're my wife, aren't you ?

CAROLINE : Yes, Freddie. That's what I want to make you understand. I want to help you if there's a strike.

FREDDIE : I shall be late for dinner if you don't let me go now. (*Exit.*)

CAROLINE : But the strike ! I might be able to say——

[*She remains in thought. Her face changes. She remains thinking deeply in the middle of the stage for a moment or two, then hides her face in her hands. She is not, however, weeping, and, when she lifts her face, it is with a curious expression of histrionic determination. Moving very slowly, she goes to the back of the stage, places a chair in front of her, moving it about meticulously until it is exactly where she wants it—and places herself, in a carefully posed attitude, with one hand on the back of the chair. Her lips move, and with her free hand she gesticulates dramatically. It is obvious that she is making an inspiring speech to an imaginary audience. Gradually words and sentences emerge.*

(*gaining in eloquence and fire as she proceeds*) : What does a strike mean . . . appeal . . . sense of fair play. Don't refuse to hear me . . . I ask you to remember . . . and play the game ! (*From this point onwards, CAROLINE becomes frankly declamatory, using her hands freely to emphasise her appeal with impassioned gestures.*) I've come down amongst you because I don't believe you'll refuse to listen to me. (*Here she pauses dramatically,*



and, when she resumes her speech, has dropped her voice several tones lower.) I want you to tell me your grievance, and let me put your point of view before your employer. Will you trust me to do that? You all know me—I know you——

*[In her ever-increasing eloquence, CAROLINE fails to notice that OWEN has now returned, dressed for dinner, and is standing gazing at her in considerable astonishment.]*

I look round me—and what do I see——

*[She sees OWEN—and breaks off dead. They stare at one another in a petrified silence.]*

I—I didn't—did you——? *(Trying to recover herself)* I was just—— *(Replaces chair.)*

OWEN *(gently and kindly)* : Yes—rather. I—I thought you were. That's perfectly all right, Caroline. I understand.

CAROLINE *(covering her face with her hands)* : Oh, how stupid one is !

OWEN : Don't. I do understand.

CAROLINE *(suddenly dropping her hands, and turning to face him with real sincerity)* : Oh, I wonder if you do. Of course, I've made a fool of myself. You heard me just now, I suppose—you must have thought I was mad.

*[She gazes at him. OWEN draws up a chair and sits down near her.]*

OWEN *(gently)* : Don't you suppose that most of us have done that kind of thing at one time or another?

CAROLINE : Oh, yes. At *one* time, perhaps. But not at another. I'll be perfectly honest with you, Owen. I'm getting very near for—well, I'm—I'm past thirty.

OWEN : We don't all grow up at the same age.

CAROLINE : Sometimes I wonder if women ever do grow up altogether. The eternal school-girl is there, somehow—underneath everything else—dramatising, and attitudinising. Oh, if



you only knew the sort of stories I sometimes make up to myself, even now !

OWEN (*gentle and interested*) : Tell me.

CAROLINE (*as she goes on, speaking more to herself than to OWEN*) : A woman wants romance, so much more than a man does—and she's so apt to look for it in personal relations—and it's never there. Men don't do that, do they ?

OWEN : Not very often.

CAROLINE : Once, I was sitting out in the moonlight on a summer's evening with—with a man. It was at a dance, and I remember that we could just hear the music in the distance. I thought I was looking rather nice—it was ten years ago—and I *felt* him looking at me. And then, at last, after a long silence, he spoke. He said : " What extraordinarily interesting things *bulbs* are ! "

OWEN : What, in heaven's name, made you marry him after that ?

CAROLINE : It wasn't after that. It was on our honeymoon. But I didn't mean to say——

OWEN : No. I know you didn't.

CAROLINE : But you guessed. There are so few men who guess anything at all, that one gets careless.

OWEN : I'm afraid you think men are extraordinarily dense.

CAROLINE : Well, I'm not really talking about men at all—only about husbands.

OWEN : Are they so different ?

CAROLINE : Quite. Men notice women's clothes—and send them flowers—and sometimes make love to them. Husbands don't really notice one's there, unless the bath water happens to be cold or the meals unpunctual.

OWEN : I don't believe all husbands are like that.

CAROLINE : No. Men never do, until they're married.

OWEN : That's what Jill says.

*[Re-enter JILL. She has now changed into evening dress.]*

JILL : I had an awful fear I was late—knowing how Freddie hates unpunctuality.

CAROLINE : Jill, what a heavenly frock ! Come here.

*[JILL comes up to her sister, and they analyse JILL's dress.]*

Turn round. . . . Yes, I see—*that's* the line at the back—and the new waist. . . . Bright colours suit you.

JILL : They'd suit you, too. You're much too pale for black, if you don't mind my saying so, darling. If you're going to wear black, you need lots and lots of make-up.

CAROLINE : You know quite well I never use it.

JILL : Yes, I know.

CAROLINE : Freddie hates it. Besides, it takes so long to rub off at bedtime, and he's always sleepy then.

JILL : Caroline, I'd like to take you to Paris for a month, and give you a course of unlimited clothes, and lipsticks, and beauty-parlours, and cocktails, and admirers.

OWEN : Hear, hear !

*[CAROLINE looks round at him.]*

Yes, my dear, I quite agree with Jill. You know, you've got an inferiority complex. Now, if you simply went to Freddie and said——

*[Enter FREDDIE, in evening clothes. OWEN's tone changes abruptly.]*

FREDDIE : Dinner's late !

OWEN : Oh—er—hullo, old man !

FREDDIE : Why hasn't the gong rung ? *(He goes to the bell, with the evident intention of ringing it.)*

CAROLINE : Oh, *don't* ring ! It's only just after eight, and you know they're short-handed just now.

OWEN : Perhaps this clock's fast.

FREDDIE : Keeps perfectly good time. I'll wait two minutes more, and then I shall ring and ask why dinner's not in. (*He takes up his stand in front of the fire, watch in hand.*)

CAROLINE (*in an agony*) : Dear, *please* don't. She's only a temporary cook, and if she's offended she'll go—and Emma is so unsettled as it is——

[*Her voice dies away, as FREDDIE holds up his hand, still watching the watch. They all fall silent, waiting nervously.*]

FREDDIE : One minute more——

JILL (*aside to OWEN*) : I shall scream, I know——

[*Into the midst of this tense silence the telephone bell suddenly sounds, making them all start. CAROLINE springs to it, and takes up the receiver.*]

CAROLINE : Yes—yes, it is. Oh—Mr. Williams—yes—he's here—one second.

[*She hands the receiver to FREDDIE, who takes her place.*]

FREDDIE : Yes, is that you, Williams ?

CAROLINE (*to JILL agitatedly*) : This means that the men at the paper-mill are coming out on strike.

FREDDIE (*into the telephone*) : I'd better come down ? Yes, I see——

CAROLINE : It is a strike.

[*FREDDIE signs for silence. As he does so, the gong in the hall sounds loudly.*]

FREDDIE (*into the telephone*) : The men are . . . yes, I see. (*When the gong starts, FREDDIE gesticulates wildly to OWEN to go and stop it. OWEN rushes to the door.*) Hullo, hullo, are you there ? Don't cut me off. (*He jerks the hook without avail.*) Are you there ? (*Gong stops.*) Damn the thing !

It seems to have gone dead all of a sudden.  
(*Drops the receiver.*)

CAROLINE : Perhaps they've cut the wire !

FREDDIE : Nonsense.

OWEN : What's happened, Freddie ?

FREDDIE : My fool of a foreman has been working the men up—making them drink, probably. Williams has lost his head. He says they're getting out of hand—and *that's* the moment the operator chooses to cut me off. (*Slams down receiver and stamps across to fireplace.*)

JILL : What's going to happen ?

OWEN : Well, I should think Freddie and I had better go down to the mill, and ring up the police on our way through the village.

CAROLINE : There's no telephone in the village, and the nearest police station is five miles away.

OWEN : Good Lord ! What a country !

JILL : Oh, Freddie, do let me play Paul Revere and make a dash with the car. Or perhaps the house is surrounded—I *must* see.

[*JILL goes out on to the porch through the still uncurtained window.*]

FREDDIE (*irritated*) : Wait a minute—wait a minute.

[*Enter EMMA.*]

EMMA : Dinner is served, madam.

CAROLINE : Dinner !

FREDDIE : You and Jill had much better go and have yours.

CAROLINE : No, of course we can't. Anything may be going to happen.

FREDDIE (*crossly*) : Absolute rot, your getting yourselves all worked up like this. What on earth does Jill think she's doing, dashing about like a bluebottle ?

OWEN : Upon my word, Freddie, that's rather



an extraordinary thing to say. She's perfectly right—you ought to get hold of the police. Why, these fellows may do anything once they've got some drink in them. They may come up here, and start rioting——

*[A faint exclamation here breaks from EMMA, whom they have all forgotten and who is listening in growing alarm. CAROLINE signs frantically to OWEN to be quiet.]*

CAROLINE : *Attention ! Prenez garde ! La femme de chambre !*—Oh, Emma, I think dinner had better go back to the kitchen for the present. I'll ring—I'll let you know when we're ready.

EMMA : Very good, madam. (*Exit.*)

FREDDIE : Absurd—encouraging the servants to think unpunctuality doesn't matter !

CAROLINE : But, Freddie, aren't you going down to find out what's happening ?

FREDDIE : Of course I am, but there's no such terrific hurry. I'm going to have a drink first, and then try that telephone again. (*Moves towards the bell.*)

CAROLINE (*hurriedly*) : You needn't ring—there's whisky and soda on the dining-room sideboard.

FREDDIE : Oh, all right. Like a drink, Owen ?

OWEN : Thanks, I think I will.

*[Exit FREDDIE, leaving the door open. OWEN makes to follow, but, noticing CAROLINE, goes to her.]*

It's all right, Caroline. Freddie'll get a move on directly. He just wants time to—to realise what's happening, I expect.

CAROLINE : Yes, yes, that's it. And he does so hate anyone making a fuss—especially me.

OWEN : A fuss ! Why, you're being perfectly wonderful !

*[CAROLINE gives him a sudden smile at this tribute, and they look at one another for a few seconds in silence.]*

FREDDIE (*off*) : Come on, Owen ! (OWEN *exits*.)

[CAROLINE goes to mirror and is tidying her hair when JILL reappears at the window.

JILL : No excitement whatever, I'm sorry to say ! Why—where are they ?

CAROLINE : Only fetching whiskies and sodas from the dining-room.

JILL : It's funny, whenever there's a crisis, men always go and have a drink, and women always go and look at themselves in the glass.

[*Re-enter* FREDDIE and OWEN with glasses.

FREDDIE : Now, then, I'll try this telephone again.

[*He goes to it and lifts receiver, with same negative result as before. During the ensuing agitated dialogue between CAROLINE and OWEN, FREDDIE remains seated by the telephone, looking from one to the other of them with great disapproval.*

CAROLINE : Oh, what is the good of that, when we know the wire's been cut ?

OWEN : I must say that wire-cutting looks as though someone meant mischief.

FREDDIE : The line's probably out of order.

CAROLINE : No, no, I'm certain it's been cut. Freddie, how *can* you sit there and do nothing ?

FREDDIE (*goaded*) : What on earth do you *want* me to do, dear ?

CAROLINE : Fetch the car ! Go down to the mill ! See the men yourself—*talk* to them !

FREDDIE : This everlasting talking——

JILL : Let me drive you to the mill, Freddie, and then push on and warn the police.

CAROLINE : Yes, yes, and I'll come with you.

FREDDIE : Good God, no.

CAROLINE : Don't you want me, Freddie ?

FREDDIE : Of course I don't, dear. You'd be horribly in the way.

JILL (*to CAROLINE*) : You said you were starting a cold. You'll only make it worse if you go out. I'll run Freddie down to the mill, and then go on to the police station.

FREDDIE : We don't know that there's any need for the police at all, at present. All this fussing . . . (*Rises.*)

OWEN : Look here, let me—— (*Opening door for JILL.*)

JILL : No, no. You stay and protect Caroline. I'll just get my coat from the hall.

[*Exit JILL.*]

CAROLINE (*to FREDDIE*) : Freddie, if it's dangerous—I *want* to come with you.

FREDDIE : Please don't be tiresome, dear.

CAROLINE : But really——

FREDDIE : Tell them to keep some dinner, but don't wait for us, whatever you do. I daresay we shan't be long.

[*Re-enter JILL in her motoring coat, and carrying FREDDIE'S coat.*]

JILL (*delighted*) : Quite ready. Here's your coat ! (*She helps FREDDIE into it.*)

OWEN : Look here, hadn't I better——?

JILL : No, you hadn't.

CAROLINE : Freddie, do let me go with you. I—I might be able to *say* something to the men.

[*JILL and FREDDIE are by this time at the door, but at this FREDDIE turns round, showing real alarm for the first time.*]

FREDDIE : “ Say something to the men ” ! Upon my soul, Caroline, I am certain you'd better go upstairs and lie down. You've been overwrought the whole evening, dear. I've noticed it. “ Say something to the men ! ! ”

[*Exit FREDDIE, followed by JILL.*]

CAROLINE (*following*) : But, Freddie——

[*CURTAIN goes down on her fruitless appeal.*]

## ACT II

SCENE I : *Takes place in the drawing-room forty minutes later.*

CAROLINE and OWEN come into the room, having presumably just finished dinner. CAROLINE goes to the window and draws back the curtain, and looks out. OWEN tries the telephone without result.

CAROLINE : If only one knew what was *happening* !

OWEN (*very nicely and kindly*) : Do you know, that's the seventh time you've said that since we sat down to dinner ?

CAROLINE : Is it ? I'm very sorry.

OWEN (*as before*) : Not at all.

CAROLINE : I ought to have gone down to the mill, you know. (*With sudden passion.*) Freddie ought to have *let* me go.

OWEN : What about that cold ?

CAROLINE : It wasn't that. You know it wasn't. I don't suppose he even knows that I *have* a cold. It was just that he didn't want me there.

OWEN : He didn't want any of us there, if it comes to that, otherwise I suppose I should have had to go, whereas I much prefer to spend the evening here with you.

CAROLINE : That's very nice of you. I'm afraid I'm not a particularly good companion, though. You see, I can't help being worried at the thought of this wretched strike.

OWEN : Worried at the thought of missing it, you mean.

CAROLINE (*astonished*) : No, I don't. (*With a change of tone*) Or do I ?

OWEN : Oh, I think so. Beyond a doubt. If you don't mind my saying so.

CAROLINE (*slowly*) : I don't think I mind at all.



Does any woman ever mind being talked to about herself?

OWEN : Some of them only like compliments. But I don't think that's what you want, somehow. What you want, Caroline—— (*He pauses, looking at EMMA, who has just entered with coffee-tray.*)

[CAROLINE gazes back, her chin resting on her hand, entirely absorbed.]

CAROLINE : Go on. (OWEN's look makes her aware of EMMA's presence. In an unnatural voice, making conversation for EMMA's benefit, she continues) It's really most extraordinary about the telephone. Of course, one *does* get a temporary block on the line sometimes.

OWEN : Oh, rather. Quite often, in fact.

CAROLINE : *Otherwise*, I daresay Freddie would have rung up to say how things are going.

OWEN : I expect he would.

CAROLINE (*laughing artificially*) : Not that I suppose they're at all serious, really. Freddie'll just say a word or two . . .

OWEN : Yes. Not *more*, I shouldn't think.

[*They watch EMMA as she goes out, and relax again as the door closes behind her.*]

Caroline, what do you *really* want out of life?

CAROLINE (*with simplicity*) : Not very much. Only just to be perfectly happy. Always.

OWEN : And loved—and admired—and successful—I suppose?

CAROLINE : Am I as egotistical as all that? Perhaps I am.

OWEN : Most of us are, only we don't admit it. We only admit that—somehow—it's all gone wrong, and our dreams aren't coming true.

CAROLINE : Do you feel that too?

OWEN : Sometimes.

CAROLINE : But *you* can still make your life whatever you want it to be. *You* haven't—— (*She breaks off, and is silent for a moment. Then suddenly exclaims*) I'd give the world for someone to tell me that I haven't made a muddle of everything !

OWEN : No. To tell you that you *have* made a muddle of everything—and that it doesn't matter a bit.

CAROLINE : Owen ! I never knew you understood women so well.

OWEN : Perhaps you'd forgotten that I'm not an Englishman.

CAROLINE : Of course. You see, the average Englishman—well——

OWEN : Every Englishman is an average Englishman. It's a national characteristic.

CAROLINE : Do you know, I feel to-night as though I'd gone back years and years, and could cast off what Jill calls all my inhibitions. I think it's the excitement about the strike.

OWEN : Even that is mostly imagination.

CAROLINE : You don't understand. When *I'm* told that the men have called a meeting and are getting out of hand, I see them rioting—wrecking the mill—lynching the foreman—I see Freddie shot, and the house in flames. In less than five minutes, I've taken my boys away from school, and am settling down with them in Australia.

OWEN (*gravely*) : I see.

CAROLINE : When I hear that one of the children has a cold, I—I practically choose the hymns for the funeral on the spot.

OWEN : I shall never, never understand how you came to marry Freddie Allerton.

CAROLINE (*startled*) : Oh ! I can't possibly discuss *that* with you.

[Enter EMMA, who collects the coffee-cups. OWEN and CAROLINE converse, as before, on artificial topics.]

I'm so glad the night's not wet for Jill's drive.

OWEN : It's turned colder though, hasn't it ?

CAROLINE : Let's have a little window open, and see.

OWEN : Shall I——

[He draws back the curtain and opens the window. The wind outside flutters the curtains.]

CAROLINE : It's certainly much colder.

[She comes and looks out beside him. They turn round to watch EMMA's exit. OWEN draws the curtain again, and crosses to close the door. Then he picks up CAROLINE's wrap from settee and, going to her, puts it round her shoulders.]

OWEN : What possessed you to do that ? You're shivering. You'll make your cold much worse.

CAROLINE : It was rather foolish, I know, but I couldn't think of anything else to say while Emma was in the room. I'm so *terrified* she'll give notice, because of the strike or something. You don't know what it's like to have the servants on one's mind day and night.

OWEN : I'm beginning to have some idea.

CAROLINE : You think I'm a fool, of course.

OWEN : You know I don't. I say, Caroline, I've got an inspiration.

CAROLINE : What ?

OWEN : Let's sit down. It's always so much easier to talk sitting than standing, don't you think ?

[They return to the sofa.]

Look here—just till the others come back—let's—play a kind of game. Let's pretend there are no such things as servants—or houses—or husbands—and that you're a completely unattached person of—say—twenty-five years old.

CAROLINE (*hesitating*) : Like Jill ?

OWEN : Yes, if you like. Only, of course, you're not a bit like Jill really.

CAROLINE : No, that's quite true. Jill's got a much better brain than I've ever had—and perhaps less imagination.

OWEN : In some ways, Jill has a brain like a man's.

CAROLINE : A brain like a man's. Whenever a man says that to a woman he thinks he's paying her a tremendous compliment. But go on about the game we're going to play.

OWEN : We *are* playing it, already. You're twenty-five—and I'm just beginning to fall in love with you.

CAROLINE (*frightened*) : Oh—no, Owen, not that.

OWEN : Oh, I think I should be. You know, we must pretend properly.

CAROLINE : You're in love with Jill.

OWEN : I haven't met Jill yet—in the game, I mean. Remember, we've gone back some years.

CAROLINE (*slowly*) : I don't think—I want to play this game.

OWEN (*gently*) : Just for one evening, Caroline. You know, you like pretending.

CAROLINE : I've always done it by myself before.

OWEN : So have I. Now we're going to do it together, that's all. I think we've just got to the stage of feeling that there'll never be time to say all the things we want to say to one another.

CAROLINE (*entering into the spirit of the thing at last*) : We're past telling one another that we must have met in a former life, though.

OWEN : Oh dear yes, that was quite early on. And we've compared our favourite books, and



agreed that there's an extraordinary mental affinity between us.

CAROLINE : We talk about ourselves, of course ?

OWEN : Naturally.

CAROLINE : Where shall we begin ? There are so many things to be said.

OWEN : Actually, I think, only one. But, of course, there are a great many different ways of saying it.

CAROLINE : Let's not go too quickly, if you don't mind.

OWEN : Oh, all right. Caroline, you're doing this perfectly. Tell me—have you ever been in love ?

CAROLINE : I've thought myself so.

OWEN : One does. Quite often, in fact. I wonder what it was like for the men you thought yourself in love with, Caroline.

CAROLINE : Rather a trial, I'm afraid. I always expected so much too much of them.

OWEN : You would, of course, being a romantic.

CAROLINE (*reminiscently*) : I was always thinking of things that they might say—or do—or write. Wonderful, beautiful things, that would make heaven open for any woman. But, of course (*with a change of tone*), the things never came true.

OWEN : And so you were disappointed. Always, Caroline ?

CAROLINE : Always. It was my own fault.

OWEN : Only the penalty of living in your imagination. You see, most men lack imagination.

CAROLINE : And yet if a man says the absolutely right thing to a woman even once, at the absolutely right moment—he can do anything he likes with her ever afterwards.

OWEN : That explains a good many affairs,

doesn't it? But, you know, I think you're making the mistake of judging all women by yourself.

CAROLINE : Aren't most of us very much alike?

OWEN : *You're* different from any other woman I've ever known.

CAROLINE : Oh ! That's exactly what I wanted you to say !

OWEN : Of course.

CAROLINE (*disconcerted*) : Did you know I wanted you to say it?

OWEN : Naturally.

[CAROLINE *does not know how to take this.*

CAROLINE : What?

OWEN : But, my dear, even though I did know you wanted me to say it, that doesn't mean that it's any the less true.

CAROLINE : I shouldn't like you to say anything to me that wasn't true, Owen.

OWEN (*after looking at her reproachfully for an instant*) : Think again, Caroline.

CAROLINE : Good heavens. . . . How dreadful. . . . Have I got to be as honest as all that with you?

OWEN : I want you to let yourself be the real Caroline, that's all.

CAROLINE : It's such a very long while since I've been *that*—I've almost forgotten what the real Caroline is like.

OWEN : I could tell you.

CAROLINE : But I'm not sure that I want you to know me too well. If you did, you mightn't like me so much.

OWEN : On the other hand, I might like you even better.

CAROLINE (*ironically*) : Could a man pay any

woman a greater compliment than to know her as she really is—and like her just the same?

OWEN : No man knows any woman as she really is. The thing's impossible. Any more than any man can ever make any woman really happy.

CAROLINE (*softly*) : None of the others ever said that. It never seemed to occur to them that there could be any doubt about it.

OWEN : Fools ! But at least, Caroline, if I couldn't make you always happy, I should notice it when you were unhappy.

CAROLINE (*looking at him, half dazed*) : I—almost—believe that you would, Owen.

[OWEN *springs to his feet and takes her by both hands.*

OWEN (*excitedly*) : After all, there comes a moment when it's—not so easy to talk sitting down.

[*He draws her to her feet. They look at one another then OWEN slowly draws CAROLINE into his arms, and, with a gesture of equal abandonment on either side, they kiss. CAROLINE is, of course, the first to return to earth, and draws away from him in dismay.*

CAROLINE : But—we can't—we mustn't—

OWEN (*watching her*) : Are you angry?

CAROLINE : I don't know. I don't think I am. (*Turning*) But we're not going to pretend any more, Owen. It's—a dangerous game.

OWEN (*moving to the fireplace*) : Yes.

CAROLINE (*still agitated*) : It's not fair, either, on Jill—or Freddie.

OWEN : If it hadn't been—for them—Caroline . . . ?

CAROLINE : Don't. What's the use?

OWEN : The only possible use would be if it gave you the courage to rebel—before it's too late.

CAROLINE : Rebel ? Against what ?

OWEN (*taken aback*) : Why—why, against the limitations of your surroundings.

[*A motor horn sounds outside.*]

CAROLINE : Hark ! They're here ! We're back in real life again. You asked me if I was angry just now. I'm not. It was—just for a few minutes—the schoolgirl's day-dream come true—that's all.

OWEN : Shall we call it—one glimpse of the Alhambra by moonlight ?

CAROLINE : Yes. Yes. Let's call it that, Owen—and forget it. Promise me that you'll forget it.

OWEN : Caroline——

CAROLINE : It was only a game—you said so yourself. It never happened at all.

OWEN : Is that what you want ?

CAROLINE : Yes.

OWEN : Then—you're going to accept the limitations of your surroundings ?

CAROLINE : Don't you understand ? It isn't the limitations of one's surroundings that matter. It's one's own limitations.

[*As she concludes the sentence, JILL enters.*]

JILL : The strike's off. They've settled everything.

CAROLINE : Where's Freddie ?

JILL : Just coming. He's putting away the car. Yes—it all fizzled out from the moment I got to the police-station, and incidentally found out on the way that your line is temporarily out of order, and will be all right to-morrow.

CAROLINE : Then they hadn't cut the wire after all ?

JILL : I'm afraid not. Life is full of anti-climax. Even the strike wasn't really imminent. Your fellow-countryman, Owen—the Welsh manager



—got into a panic, that's all. Freddie settled things quite nicely and quickly. Have you been dreadfully worried, Caroline darling, thinking all kinds of things were happening?

CAROLINE : No—yes—I—I don't think so. I don't know——

JILL (*looking at her*) : Oh—why—what's happened?

CAROLINE (*her face averted*) : My cold is rather bad, I think. (*She holds her handkerchief before her face.*)

OWEN : I knew that window was a mistake. We had it open for a bit after dinner.

CAROLINE (*seizing on this as a pretext*) : Dinner ! You haven't had any, Jill. I'll go and see about it.

[JILL makes a protesting movement.

It's no trouble. I asked Emma to have a tray ready. (OWEN goes towards the bell.) No, really—I'd rather not ring.

[Exit CAROLINE.

JILL : What *have* you been doing, Owen?

OWEN : Behaving like a cad, I rather think.

JILL (*reflectively*) : One does sometimes. But I'm sorry, if it's been at Caroline's expense.

OWEN : You're rather an understanding person, aren't you?

JILL : Only sensible. Shall we talk about it, or not?

OWEN : There's really frightfully little to talk about.

JILL : I know just what you mean. And I suppose propinquity, that you were so eloquent about earlier in the evening, did its usual work.

OWEN : That's about it. No—I'll be honest. There *was* more to it than that. Just for a moment.

JILL (*with sudden fire*) : I'm glad to hear it ! Caroline's worth the real thing—even if it is only for a moment.

OWEN : But, Jill—— (*He stops, perplexed.*)

JILL (*impatiently*) : Well ? Go on !

OWEN : Don't you—don't you mind ?

JILL : Mind ? Yes, I do. But you and I are real people, and so I can mind, and understand, at one and the same time.

OWEN : Jill, you're wonderful !

JILL : I know I am. And, apart from that, it *was* my idea that you might take Caroline's mind off the fish.

OWEN : To be accurate, you said : Off the fish and Freddie. I do think I succeeded in displacing the fish—but not Freddie.

JILL : I suppose not. Caroline's like that. I hope you haven't made everything much worse than it was before.

OWEN : How ?

JILL : Caroline's imagination is so much too strong for her. Supposing she gets all worked up, and decides to tell Freddie that she's let another man make love to her ?

OWEN : But, my dear, she didn't, in any serious sense of the word.

JILL : I know, I know. But it's feeling that counts, with women like Caroline—not fact.

OWEN : Choosing the hymns for the funeral.

JILL : Exactly. And I expect, by this time, she's been through the Divorce Court, and Freddie has had his decree made absolute.

OWEN : I suppose you're right, as usual. Look here, hadn't I better go and help Freddie put away the car or something ?

JILL : It's extraordinary how little demand there is for the society of those who are usually right.

OWEN : Jill, it isn't that——

JILL : I know it isn't. I'm sorry I'm being like this. I know it's unreasonable, and unjust, and all the rest of it—but you've made me cross.

OWEN : Then you do care ?

JILL : Care ! I rather think I hate you just at the moment.

*[Enter FREDDIE, more exhilarated than we have seen him yet, and rubbing his hands together with mingled cold and satisfaction.]*

FREDDIE : Settled the whole thing ! I told you there was nothing to panic about. I suppose there's some dinner for us.

JILL : Caroline has gone to see about it.

FREDDIE : See about it ! Haven't we got any servants in the house ? *(Crosses to the bell and rings it, then goes to warm himself at the fire.)* Extraordinary how chilly it's turned.

OWEN : Yes. I'm afraid it's made Caroline's cold worse.

FREDDIE *(to JILL)* : What about having dinner in here in front of the fire ?

JILL : Certainly.

*[Enter EMMA.]*

EMMA : Did you ring, sir ?

FREDDIE : Yes. Bring some soup or sandwiches—or whatever's ready—in here, please, and—I say—bring that bottle of champagne out of the wine-cooler, and four glasses.

EMMA : Very good, sir. *(Exit EMMA.)*

FREDDIE : Must celebrate the occasion, eh ?

OWEN *(to FREDDIE)* : Well—what happened ?

FREDDIE : It was—but where's Caroline ? I want her to hear this.

JILL : She went to tell the maids about supper.

FREDDIE : Running after the servants ! What's

the good of keeping a dog and barking yourself?  
JILL : She'll be here in a minute.

[*Enter CAROLINE and EMMA.*

CAROLINE : Freddie, do you *really* want dinner in here ?

FREDDIE (*jocosely*) : Shouldn't have ordered it if I didn't should I ?

OWEN (*rising*) : Can I help ?

CAROLINE : No, no, we can manage.

JILL : *Must* I help, is what I always say.

[*EMMA and CAROLINE complete the table preparations, and FREDDIE draws up his armchair.*

FREDDIE (*cheerfully*) : Come along, Jill. It's all ready.

CAROLINE : You need not wait, Emma.

[*Exit EMMA. In the conversation that ensues, FREDDIE alone is exuberantly cheerful, not perceiving that the others are pre-occupied ; JILL out of temper, OWEN uneasy, and CAROLINE extremely upset.*

FREDDIE : Upon my soul, I'm hungry—I expect you are too, Jill. Start with some soup ; that's right. Well, it really was a most extraordinary thing—that fellow Williams absolutely had the wind up. Scared, that's what he was. Simply scared stiff.

OWEN (*absently*) : Was he really ?

FREDDIE : Not a doubt about it. You remember my telling you, Caroline, that it wasn't too easy to get Devonshire men to work under a Welsh manager, don't you ? (*To OWEN*) I say, I beg your pardon.

OWEN : Oh, that's all right.

CAROLINE (*starting violently*) : Yes—yes, of course I do.

FREDDIE (*shaking a forefinger impressively*) : That was the *whole* trouble. That and absolutely nothing else.



CAROLINE : Really—absolutely nothing else.

FREDDIE : Of course, the men didn't *say* so. That's not their way at all. But I spotted it directly, although they brought out some vamped-up grievance about our having had to make a reduction on tonnage-rate.

[*A silence. No one is attending. JILL realises this, and automatically repeats FREDDIE's last words.*]

JILL : —a reduction on tonnage-rate—yes?

FREDDIE : As a matter of fact, that really only affects one or two of them.

JILL : Oh ! of course.

FREDDIE : I don't know what you mean by "Of course." But you're not eating anything—take a sandwich. And we must have a drink all round to celebrate the collapse of the strike. Ha-ha ! (*He opens the champagne.*) Upon my soul, I don't know when I've heard of a more ridiculous storm in a tea-cup. If you could have seen that ass Williams' face !

[*FREDDIE laughs heartily. Gradually he perceives that his mirth is not being joined in by the others.*]

(*Puzzled*) Yes. I suppose, really, it doesn't seem quite so amusing unless one knows the ins and outs of it as I do.

CAROLINE (*trying to atone*) : Oh, but it does, Freddie. I—I can quite see how funny it must have been—Williams getting into a panic—and—and you going to talk to the men and—and everything.

OWEN (*with pseudo-heartiness*) : Rather !

FREDDIE (*drinking his champagne*) : Well, here's to the strike ! And may all our troubles disperse as easily !

JILL (*looking at OWEN*) : May all our troubles disperse as easily !

OWEN (*hastily*) : Tell us what you said to the men, Freddie.

FREDDIE : Well, I started in about the tonnage-rate question, of course. Williams was under the impression that they felt strongly about it, because up to now we've been having a bonus on tonnage-rate. As a matter of fact, the men are really getting very high pay, without a sufficient increase in production. The tonnage-rate was badly calculated. I don't know if you see what I mean ? (*Turning to OWEN.*)

[*A silence. None of the other three has been attending.*]

Eh ?

OWEN (*starting*) : What ?—Of course—yes.

[*FREDDIE stares at him, then turns and looks at JILL, who also starts.*]

JILL : No, naturally not. I mean—I quite agree with you, Freddie.

CAROLINE : So do I.

FREDDIE (*stiffly*) : There isn't anything to *dis-*agree about, exactly. Well——

CAROLINE : No, no, *do* go on. Go on talking, Freddie.

FREDDIE : Talking isn't very much in my line, is it ? And I must say Caroline, you don't seem to me to pay very much attention when I *do* speak.

CAROLINE : But I am—— (*Her voice falters, and she puts her handkerchief to her face.*) It's only my cold.

FREDDIE : You'd better go to bed, I should think.

CAROLINE : No, no. You haven't nearly told us about the strike yet.

FREDDIE : I've been telling you for the last quarter of an hour, only you've not been listening.

OWEN : I'm afraid it's my fault.

[*CAROLINE starts, and looks round at him.*]

That open window—it's made your cold much worse, I can see.

CAROLINE : I'm afraid it has. (*She sneezes.*)

JILL : Try Vapex, darling. (*Starts to rise, but promptly subsides again when OWEN moves.*)

OWEN (*starting up*) : Can I fetch it? Perhaps Jill could—could show me where it is.

JILL (*not moving*) : It's on the top of the medicine-chest in the bathroom, where you can't possibly miss it.

CAROLINE : No, please don't bother. I shall be going up to bed directly.

JILL : Yes, so shall I. I need sleep, after all this excitement.

OWEN : Jill, don't go up yet. It's our last evening here.

FREDDIE : By Jove, so it is ! I say, Owen, you remember what I was telling you last night. Come and sit down.

[FREDDIE *leans back, crossing his legs comfortably, and begins to speak. His voice goes on, whilst OWEN sits with his eyes fixed on JILL, who remains motionless, her thoughts obviously elsewhere, and CAROLINE gazes haggardly at her husband and stifles yet another sneeze with her handkerchief. FREDDIE takes final gulp of champagne and begins :*

The fact of the matter is that the whole business of paper-making, so far as we are concerned, turns on the demand for high-grade paper.

[CAROLINE *sneezes loudly. FREDDIE stares at her, and continues :*

Now, take the case of a really high-grade opaque paper. There is practically no demand for it at all nowadays. And that's hit us particularly hard. High-grade paper has been our speciality for years. We used to be able to count on a big Government contract for envelopes alone that kept the mills busy. The men know that perfectly well. They realise that it's all we can do to keep going, now that such a lot of cheap,

inferior paper is being used. So, as I pointed out to them, to talk about the reduction on tonnage-rate is simply nonsense . . .

[CAROLINE suddenly blows her nose loudly. FREDDIE sits up and stares at her resentfully.]

BLACK OUT  
AND  
CURTAIN

SCENE II

SCENE II takes place in Caroline's bedroom an hour later. It is furnished exactly as you would expect it to be furnished : that is to say, there is a large double bed, an unsophisticated washstand, the usual chairs and tables, several photographs in frames, and a dressing-table, before which CAROLINE, in a reasonably, but not extravagantly, becoming dressing-gown, is now seated.

There are two doors. One of these obviously leads to FREDDIE's dressing-room, as he keeps on walking in and out of it, each time in a further stage of preparedness for bed. Throughout the scene that follows, CAROLINE, whether speaking herself or listening to FREDDIE, is automatically going through a series of actions that are evidently habitual to her : i.e. brushing her hair, greasing her face and wiping it with a sheet of tissue paper that afterwards goes into the waste-paper basket, cold-creaming her hands and neck, rubbing something from a little jar into her face, turning her stockings inside out and hanging them over the back of a chair, and so on. At intervals she sneezes. As the curtain goes up, FREDDIE is standing in the communicating doorway without his dinner-jacket, and CAROLINE is sitting at the dressing-table.



FREDDIE : Have you tried the Vapex ?

CAROLINE : I've sprinkled some on the pillow.

*[They both glance at the bed.]*

Do you want some on your side too ?

FREDDIE : Might be as well, I suppose.

*[Disappears into dressing-room.]*

CAROLINE *sprinkles the Vapex, then returns to dressing-table and sits motionless.*

*(Calls from within)* You know, that little car of Jill's wasn't running properly to-night. I rather think she's missing on one cylinder.

CAROLINE : Is she ?

FREDDIE : She's got a long run ahead of her. *(Reappears in doorway.)* They ought to test the sparking-plug first thing to-morrow. There'll be plenty of time.

CAROLINE *(tonelessly)* : Yes, I suppose so.

FREDDIE : Well, let's see. Supposing they average thirty—or let's say twenty-five, to be on the safe side. *(Pulling dress shirt off over his head.)* That means that if they leave here at ten o'clock they ought to be at Honiton by twelve, then Yeovil at about one—allow an hour, say, for lunch—they get off again at two sharp, and reach London, bar accidents, at seven o'clock. Say seven-thirty, if you like.

CAROLINE *(desperately)* : Yes, yes, I see.

FREDDIE *(after surveying her for a moment in astonished silence)* : Is anything the matter with you ? Besides your cold, I mean.

CAROLINE *(desperately)* : Everything is the matter with me.

FREDDIE : Don't exaggerate, dear.

*[He returns to the dressing-room. CAROLINE stares haggardly after him.]*

CAROLINE *(calling)* : Freddie ! *(Louder)* Freddie !

FREDDIE *(reappearing with pyjamas in one hand and shirt in the other)* : What ?

CAROLINE : Freddie, do you think that you—you understand me ?

FREDDIE : You didn't call me in just to hear that, did you ? Upon my soul, Caroline, you're a bit unreasonable sometimes.

CAROLINE : Yes, I daresay I am. One doesn't go on being reasonable for ever.

[FREDDIE *gradually backs into the dressing-room once more as she goes on speaking.*

(*Staring at herself in the glass and not perceiving FREDDIE's withdrawal*) I wonder what you'd say if the day came when I found that I just couldn't go on any longer. For years and years I've pretended to myself that I was quite contented, and that one didn't need, or expect, any kind of emotional life after one had passed thirty—and that to be your wife, and the boys' mother, was enough. Part of me has been dead—stifled, and pushed out of sight. I don't even think about it any more . . . and then . . . one . . . one reads something, or—or meets someone—and all of a sudden one knows. Life *oughtn't* to be like this—it isn't enough !

[*As CAROLINE ends, on an emotional crescendo, she flings her arms out on the dressing-table, and hides her face against them. There is a moment's silence. Then FREDDIE, now in pyjamas, appears at the door.*

FREDDIE : Look here, dear, where the devil is that tube of Kolynos ?

[*He goes to the washstand, hunts about on the shelf there for the Kolynos, and continues plaintively :*

*Must you keep on moving it in here ? It's surely simply a question of remembering to get one of your own.*

CAROLINE (*tensely*) : I want to speak to you.

FREDDIE : If it's about the Kolynos, all I can say is——

CAROLINE : It isn't about the Kolynos.

FREDDIE (*in tones of great relief*) : Here it is at last !

[*He is once more returning into the dressing-room, but CAROLINE moves between him and the door.*]

CAROLINE : Such a little thing can suddenly change the whole world—make everything look different—and yet one's really *known* all the time. This evening—I woke up.

FREDDIE : I didn't even know you'd been to sleep, but I daresay it was a very good thing. Now look here, dear, I really do wish you'd get into bed.

CAROLINE (*unheeding*) : Supposing, Freddie, that I fell in love ?

FREDDIE (*arrested*) : That you *what*, dear ?

CAROLINE : Fell in love. Women *do*. Even (*bitterly*) happily married women.

FREDDIE (*simply*) : Not in our class, they don't, dear.

CAROLINE : Or supposing somebody fell in love with me ?

FREDDIE : How could anybody fall in love with you when there isn't a soul about the place except the rector, who's turned seventy, and an occasional feller for tennis that one knows all about ? It seems to me that you're talking nonsense, Caroline.

CAROLINE : What would you do if I said that I—I'd fallen in love ?

FREDDIE : Don't be foolish, dear.

CAROLINE : Answer me.

FREDDIE : How can I answer a silly question like that ? It's ridiculous. Besides, you'll make your cold worse, standing about.

CAROLINE : Never mind that. I want to know what you'd say—what you'd do—if I came and

told you that I—I'd let another man make love to me?

FREDDIE (*reluctantly*) : Naturally, I should do what any other decent man in that position would do—kick the fellow out of the house and tell him to go to hell.

CAROLINE : Would that help?

FREDDIE : What's that got to do with it?

CAROLINE : And what about me?

FREDDIE (*uncomprehending*) : How do you mean, what about you?

CAROLINE : Should you forgive me?

FREDDIE : Well—I suppose that depends how far—— But we needn't discuss it.

CAROLINE : You wouldn't want to give me my freedom?

FREDDIE : D'you mean a divorce?

[CAROLINE *nods*.

(*With determination*) Look here, Caroline, if this is some of Jill's nonsense, I don't want any more of it. She's got this newspaper work of hers in London, and no doubt she mixes with some very queer people there, and hears a lot of this up-to-date jargon—but that's no reason why you should imitate her. You've got to remember that you're a wife and a mother. Besides, Jill's ten years younger than you are.

CAROLINE : Ten years younger than I am. Yes.

FREDDIE : And now, dear, we really must——

CAROLINE (*unheeding*) : Ten years younger. That's a whole lifetime, isn't it?

FREDDIE (*annoyed*) : It's not a lifetime at all. Ten years—is ten years.

CAROLINE : It's a lifetime to a woman, all the same. (*With a sudden gesture of despair*) Oh, you needn't be afraid, Freddie. I shan't ever come



and tell you that another man has been making love to me.

FREDDIE : I should hope not.

CAROLINE : If—if it ever did happen, it would only be a pretence. Just—a kind of game. Not worth remembering or—or ever thinking about again.

[*At the ring of despair in her voice, FREDDIE looks at her uneasily.*]

FREDDIE : Anybody would suppose you *wanted* it to happen.

CAROLINE : Would they ?

[*She begins to laugh hysterically, whilst FREDDIE stares at her in solemn perplexity.*]

It's all right—I—I—oh, Freddie, *don't* look at me like that !

FREDDIE : I'm certain you're not well. Do you think you've got a temperature ?

CAROLINE : I don't know. I don't know what's the matter with me.

[*She hides her face in her hands.*]

FREDDIE (*alarmed*) : Where's the thermometer ?

[*Hunting about on washstand and in drawer.*]

It is a most extraordinary thing that in this house nothing is ever to be found in its proper place. Now, I could have sworn that the last time I saw that thermometer——

CAROLINE (*at the end of her endurance*) : Never mind—oh, never mind.

FREDDIE : But I do mind. It's got to be found. The thing must be *somewhere*, you know. (*Goes into dressing-room.*)

CAROLINE (*in desperation*) : Jill has a thermometer.

FREDDIE (*off*) : Has she ? Well, I think I ought to go and borrow it. I'm certain you're starting 'flu.

*[Enters, putting on dressing-gown, which catches in door. He says "Damn" and jerks it free.]*

I'll go and ask her for it now.

CAROLINE : Yes, yes—go.

*[Exit FREDDIE. CAROLINE springs up, locks the door, and stands, her hands tightly wrung together.]*

I can't go on—I can't. Owen—Owen—why didn't you really mean it? Oh, if only there was someone—anyone—to understand . . .

*[She pushes back the hair from her forehead with a gesture of despair, looking all round her. Her eyes fall on one of the many photographs of her children on the wall.]*

*(In a voice gradually strangled with the sobs she is repressing)* Some women . . . haven't even got children. I—I've got the two boys. . . . It's their lives that matter. Mine's over . . . I—I'm not going to mind any more. . . .

*[There is a knock at the door, and the handle turns.]*

*(Distraught)* What is it? Oh, what is it?

FREDDIE *(outside)* : I'll go round by the other door.

*[CAROLINE looks wildly round her, then drops on her knees by the bed, her face hidden.]*

CAROLINE : I can't go on—I can't go on—

*[FREDDIE enters, shaking the thermometer vigorously. He suddenly perceives CAROLINE.]*

FREDDIE : I say, dear—is anything the matter?

CURTAIN

### ACT III

*Takes place in the Allertons' drawing-room three days later.*

*The curtain goes up and shows the drawing-room as in Act I., except that instead of evening it is now morning, three days later.*

*Enter FREDDIE, in his favourite tweeds—JILL enters first and holds the door for FREDDIE—carrying a couple of suit-cases, which he deposits by the window. JILL wears a morning frock suitable for travelling, and carries a leather motor-coat, cap, and bag en suite.*

FREDDIE : Is that the lot ?

JILL : Yes, thanks.

FREDDIE : What about Owen's bag ?

JILL : I expect he's taken it out to the car himself. Don't bother about him.

FREDDIE : That's all right. It's only that Caroline seems to think Emma's been a bit overworked lately, what with our having no housemaid, and Caroline's having been laid up, and everything.

JILL : I know. And I'm afraid our staying on has made more work, too, but we've tried to help—and I had to make sure Caroline was really all right.

FREDDIE : By Jove, yes. That was a very nasty chill she caught.

JILL : If she hadn't collapsed with a chill, she'd have had a bad nervous breakdown. In fact, as it was——

FREDDIE : Now, now, now, what's the good of saying a thing like that ? Caroline was upset, I know. She'd worked herself up about the strike.

JILL : The strike ! I suppose it was a great relief to you, Freddie, that the strike fizzled out before it had begun ?

FREDDIE : Of course it was. What do you suppose ?

JILL : Men never seem to mind an anti-climax. Now *I* shall never forget how exciting that evening was, when we all thought they might come up and mob us at any minute.

FREDDIE (*indignantly*) : I never thought anything of the kind.

JILL : Not even when Williams telephoned ?

FREDDIE : Certainly not ! The fellow lost his head. He isn't English ; he's Welsh. I knew very well that was all it was. If you remember, I said so at the time.

JILL : I believe you did.

FREDDIE : I say—I'm sorry, Jill ; I quite forgot.

JILL : What ?

FREDDIE : Your friend—Owen—Welsh !

JILL : Oh, that's all right.

FREDDIE : Honestly, I always look upon him as being as English as I am myself—practically.

JILL : Thanks, Freddie.

FREDDIE : Not at all. I expect he'd like some help with the car.

JILL : Please don't go. I want to talk to you.

FREDDIE : Talk ?

JILL : About Caroline.

FREDDIE : Caroline ? Oh—Caroline. Well, I'm thankful to say she's quite herself again now.

JILL : That's just what's worrying me.

FREDDIE (*after an astonished pause*) : What did you say ?

JILL : I said : That's just what's worrying me.

FREDDIE : I'm afraid I don't understand.

JILL : I know you don't, Freddie. But I want to try and make you understand.



FREDDIE : Will it take long ?

JILL : I don't know. That rather depends on you, doesn't it ? Freddie, you remember the other night, before the doctor came, when Caroline's temperature went up and up, and we didn't quite know how bad she might be ?

FREDDIE : Yes, I remember.

JILL : Could you tell me exactly what thoughts went through your mind as we sat there almost helpless, waiting for him ?

FREDDIE (*outraged*) : No, of course I couldn't. And I wouldn't if I could, what's more.

JILL : Because you don't want to admit that what you felt was a perfectly genuine, honest emotion.

FREDDIE : Upon my word, Jill, really——

JILL : I'm sorry, but I simply must. For Caroline's sake.

FREDDIE : Caroline never suggested this nonsense.

JILL : Of course she didn't. But do you suppose I haven't seen for myself that she's unhappy ?

FREDDIE (*astounded*) : Unhappy ?

JILL : Do *you* think she's happy ?

FREDDIE : I've never thought about it.

JILL : The husband's slogan. Think about it, then, Freddie, before it's too late.

FREDDIE : Too late for what ?

JILL : Too late for everything—for the Alhambra by moonlight, if you like to put it that way.

FREDDIE : But I *don't* like to put it that way ! I don't even know what you're talking about.

JILL : I'm sorry. May I try and explain ?

FREDDIE (*reluctantly*) : If you really feel you must.

JILL : I do. Look here ! Caroline is the type of

woman to whom personal relationships mean everything. She can't help it.

FREDDIE (*helplessly*) : No one likes a—a feminine woman better than I do myself.

JILL : That's lucky. But have you ever told her so ?

FREDDIE : What on earth are you driving at ? A joke's a joke, but really——

JILL : I never felt less like joking in my life. Why don't you *tell* Caroline that you think she's a feminine woman—that you admire feminine women—that you love her—that you think she runs the house beautifully——

FREDDIE (*interrupting*) : But I don't think she does. Not always.

JILL : What does that matter ? She won't care what you *think*—only what you *say*.

FREDDIE (*bewildered*) : But she'd be a fool if she felt that, and Caroline's not a fool.

JILL : *Tell* her you think she isn't a fool ! Not in those words, naturally—you can say you find that companionship with her has spoilt every other woman for you.

FREDDIE : How on earth do you think of speeches like that ?

JILL : Oh, if men only realised the admirable speeches that women are making for them almost every hour of their lives !

FREDDIE : The fact is, women haven't got enough to think about, that's their trouble.

JILL : And so they think about men ? I quite agree with you, but it doesn't apply to my generation. Thank heaven, we have jobs now, and choose them ourselves.

FREDDIE : Caroline's work—which is the highest to which a woman can be called—is to be a wife and mother.

JILL : Yes, poor darling. But, then, the choice of a career was awfully limited in her day, wasn't it? However, it's no good crying over spilt milk now——

FREDDIE : Spilt milk?

JILL : —the point is, you and Caroline have got a wonderful opportunity of starting fresh. The strike, and her illness, and everything that's happened, will all help to create the right atmosphere.

FREDDIE : What atmosphere? Why?

JILL : An exciting, romantic, stimulating sort of atmosphere. It'll make it so much easier for you to begin *saying* things to Caroline.

FREDDIE : I'm afraid I'm not very good at—er—*saying* a very great deal.

JILL : I've noticed that.

FREDDIE : If you'll forgive my mentioning it, I'm afraid one looks upon all this putting-things-into-words as being rather bad form.

JILL : Our Public Schools have a lot to answer for. Well, of course, I know it's all rather difficult for you. Perhaps you'd better not begin by *saying* a great deal. There are lots of little things you can *do*.

FREDDIE : But I'm always doing little things.

JILL : Are you?

FREDDIE : Yes! Why, only yesterday I spent twenty minutes putting a new washer on the bathroom tap.

JILL : I see! I suppose you never give Caroline flowers?

FREDDIE : Flowers? The garden's full of them.

JILL : I said *give* them to her.

FREDDIE : Wouldn't that be a bit pointless, when she can pick as many as she wants for herself?

JILL (*impatiently*) : Well, well, she can't *now*,

anyway. She hasn't been out of her room for three days. You could have some ready to welcome her when she comes down this morning for the first time.

FREDDIE (*looking round him*) : Emma put fresh ones in here only yesterday.

JILL : Hush ! She's coming down now. Never mind Emma's. Go and pick some for her *yourself*, and bring them in to her. Quickly !

FREDDIE (*bewildered*) : But——

JILL : Oh, do go !

[*She hustles him out at the window as CAROLINE comes in at the door carrying her knitting. CAROLINE is pale, and moves slowly. JILL goes to meet her, and settles her on the sofa.*]

Darling, do you feel shaky ? Shall I close the window ?

CAROLINE : No, thank you, dear.

JILL : Are you sure you ought to have come down ?

CAROLINE : Quite sure. I am so glad to be out of my room. (*She looks round her.*) I feel rather as if I had been dead and haven't quite come to life again. It is absurd, really, when I was only ill such a very little while. It seems ages since I was last in this room.

JILL : That was the night that Freddie and I went down to the mill.

CAROLINE : Yes.

[*A silence.*]

Did Owen ever say anything to you about that night, Jill ?

JILL (*very gently*) : I think it was I who said something to him. Not anything that you would have minded, though.

CAROLINE (*with an effort*) : Do you want me to tell you ?



JILL (*as before*) : No. I didn't want Owen to tell me, either.

CAROLINE : I made him promise that he'd forget—absolutely. Though there wasn't anything real to forget, Jill. It was only that—I lost my way, for a few minutes, between reality and pretence.

JILL : One does.

CAROLINE : Owen didn't. Not really. I—I am glad he didn't, Jill.

[*A silence. Then CAROLINE resumes in a more natural voice :*

Being ill has made it all seem so long ago. I believe I was rather delirious that night.

JILL : Perhaps.

CAROLINE (*vehemently*) : I know I was talking nonsense part of the time. I was hardly conscious of what I said. I am so thankful I can't remember.

JILL : Why ?

CAROLINE : Well, just think of what even one's conscious thoughts are like, sometimes !

JILL : You're quite right there. I'm often thankful, as I was saying to Freddie just now, that women nowadays have so many things to think of besides their emotions.

CAROLINE : Did you say that to *Freddie* ?

JILL : Yes.

CAROLINE : You said a thing like that to Freddie, at eleven o'clock in the morning ?

JILL : Yes.

CAROLINE : What did he say ?

JILL : Oh, that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world, or something. That's what he *meant*, anyway.

CAROLINE : Jill, you ought to remember that

Freddie can't be expected to see things in exactly the same light that you do.

JILL : Of course not. He's so much older.

CAROLINE : Yes, I expect that's it.

JILL : In fact, I was telling him so this morning.

CAROLINE : That as well !

JILL : Yes.

CAROLINE : And after he stayed away from the mill on purpose to see the last of you and Owen !

JILL : That's a very nice idea—but I expect he *really* stayed at home because it was your first day downstairs.

CAROLINE (*wistfully*) : He hasn't said so, has he ?

[JILL is silent, then suddenly speaks.]

JILL : Caroline darling, do you mind if I ask you a fearfully indiscreet question ?

CAROLINE : No—in fact, I should like it.

JILL : I quite agree that indiscreet questions are the only ones really worth asking. It's this : You do care for Freddie, don't you ? I mean fundamentally ?

CAROLINE (*thoughtfully*) : Yes. (*Gaining in assurance*) Yes, I do. It may seem odd—in fact, I often think it is—but I do.

JILL : I wonder why ?

CAROLINE : After a woman has lived with a man for years, day in and day out, and shared his home, and his children, and his interests, she's bound to end either by hating him, or else by being fond of him. I don't hate Freddie.

JILL : And he's fond of you, too.

CAROLINE (*sighing*) : I know. Husbands nearly always are fond of their wives—especially those that live in the country and don't see anyone else. But they never show it.

JILL : It's a pity.

CAROLINE : I expect I'm a fool, to feel that it matters.

JILL (*suddenly springing to her feet*) : No, you're not. You're just—romantic, and imaginative, and sentimental. So are most women. And they go on and on, waging a perpetual conflict between real life and the life of their secret dreams.

CAROLINE : Jill !

JILL : Yes. I'm getting it clear now—don't stop me. It isn't only you, it's me as well, and most other women, I expect. We can't learn to be content with—just glimpses of the Alhambra by moonlight. We want it there always, and all the time. And when we know it's not there, instead of facing the fact, we screw up our eyes and try to see it still in—in the outline of the chicken-house.

CAROLINE : Just—pretending ?

JILL (*assenting*) : Just pretending. The school-girl's day-dream, in which she's her own heroine all the time.

CAROLINE : But one doesn't go on being a school-girl all one's life.

JILL : Are you quite sure of that ?

[*A silence—and then JILL suddenly alters her tone and becomes matter-of-fact again.*

After all, personal relations are *not* everything. Women do know that nowadays.

CAROLINE : We may know it. But do we feel it ?

JILL : We're learning to. To face facts—make the best of things as they are—accept life as it really is——

[*As she speaks, EMMA enters.*

EMMA : If you please, madam, the fish is here.

JILL : That's exactly what I meant ! The fish ! It's all part of life——

CAROLINE (*harassed*) : *Oui, oui—mais pas maintenant.* What has he brought, Emma ?

EMMA : Soles, madam, and a piece of turbot.

CAROLINE : Turbot, Emma ?

EMMA : Cook don't feel sure of the turbot, madam. She says soles are safer.

CAROLINE : Then two small soles, please, Emma.

EMMA : Very good, madam. (*Exit.*)

[CAROLINE *leans back again, tired.*

JILL : You're tired. It's more than time we were off. I shall go and hurry up Owen.

CAROLINE : No, no, don't.

JILL : He'll come in and tell us as soon as the car's ready.

[*A pause.*

CAROLINE : Of course, darling, I don't want you to tell me anything you don't *want* to tell me.

JILL : Don't you ?

CAROLINE : Well, of course——

[*They both laugh.*

Is it that you can't make up your mind ?

JILL : I'm always making it up. First one way and then the other. That's what I hate.

CAROLINE : I daresay Owen doesn't enjoy it much, either.

JILL : You're quite right ; he doesn't. I often think I shall lose him altogether.

CAROLINE : Oh, Jill, do you really ?

JILL : No.

CAROLINE : You're in love with him, Jill ?

[JILL *signs assent.*

Doesn't that simplify things ?

JILL : I'm afraid it doesn't. You see, I do try to face facts, and I know that, once the glamour has gone, it won't come back again.

CAROLINE : And it goes, with domestic life.

JILL : Owen's an only son—he'll have to live at that place of theirs in Wales—do county business—look after the estate—his wife will have to



pay calls—and run the Women's Institute—and think about the servants—and talk about the garden.

CAROLINE : Yes, yes—all that's true.

JILL : In a couple of years' time, Owen will be going to sleep over his newspaper every evening and—— (*Breaks off.*) I didn't mean that.

CAROLINE : Yes, you did. It doesn't matter. Jill, you're wrong.

JILL : Wrong ?

CAROLINE : You're afraid that you and Owen will grow like Freddie and me. Don't interrupt me—it's true. But you're wrong—absolutely wrong. You said just now that women were always pretending. Don't you see that if you can *say* that, and realise it, it won't be true about you ? *You're* not going to live in a make-believe world, that'll never, never square with everyday life. You'll know your day-dreams for what they are—the schoolgirl's romance. You'll even have the courage to laugh at them.

JILL (*thoughtfully*) : I've never thought of it like that. It makes a difference. But Owen . . . ?

CAROLINE : It's the woman who makes a marriage what it is—not the man.

JILL : That's true.

CAROLINE : And then Owen—he has imagination—he's a little bit different——

JILL : Perhaps . . .

CAROLINE (*bringing out her words with hesitation, as though struggling with a dim remembrance*) : Yes—I—I—— He's the kind of man who might know . . . what a woman was really like . . . and yet . . . love her just the same. . . . (*She passes her hand across her eyes.*) I feel just as if I'd said all this before.

JILL : You haven't—but I'm glad you've said it now.

CAROLINE : So am I. It came to me like an inspiration.

JILL : That's because it was somebody else's problem. I was inspired, too, if you remember, when we were discussing yours.

[OWEN *appears at the window. He is wearing garments suitable for his motor drive back to London.*

OWEN : Good morning, Caroline. Splendid to see you downstairs. How are you? Really all right?

CAROLINE : Quite, thank you. I'd have come down yesterday if Jill would have let me. You'll be gone almost at once, I suppose, and I've been such a bad hostess.

OWEN : I hope you'll let me come here again, one day.

CAROLINE : We'd love to have you, any time you can get away. You mustn't forget to write your name in the Visitors' Book before you go.

[FREDDIE *appears at window.*

FREDDIE : Is Caroline there?

CAROLINE : Yes, I'm here. It's nice to be downstairs again.

FREDDIE (*comes in, carrying a bunch of roses*) : Look dear—I—I've brought you these.

CAROLINE : Freddie ! (*She takes the roses.*)

FREDDIE : It was Jill's idea.

JILL : Oughtn't we to be making a start, Owen?

OWEN : Yes, if you're ready. The car's O.K. now.

FREDDIE : You must sign your name in the Visitors' Book before you go. Let me see—it ought to be in here. (*Goes to writing-table.*) No. She must have put it in the hall—or in the study. (*Goes towards the bell. JILL moves between him and the bell, looking at him, meaningly.*)

[FREDDIE *turns slowly, without having rung.*

(*Going to the door*) I'll see if I can find it myself.

CAROLINE : Oh, Freddie—how good of you to think of Emma ! It's only just while we're short-handed. (*Gets up and follows him.*) I believe I know where the Visitors' Book is——

[CAROLINE goes out, FREDDIE following her.]

JILL : How do you think Caroline looks ?

OWEN : Rather white, doesn't she ?

JILL : I'm afraid so. Poor darling, I do hate leaving her.

OWEN (*stiffly*) : If you really want to stay, and they can go on putting you up, please don't bother about me.

JILL : Thanks, but I'm due at the office to-morrow morning.

OWEN : So that's that. By the way, I don't know if you happen to remember that we came here partly in order that you might have an opportunity of making up your mind.

JILL : I remember perfectly.

OWEN : I suppose I may conclude that you *have* made it up ?

JILL (*ironically*) : And on what grounds are you basing your conclusion ?

OWEN : Principally on the grounds that you have avoided, as far as possible, being left alone with me for one moment in the course of the past three days.

JILL : So you've noticed that ?

OWEN : I'm not Freddie Allerton, my dear.

JILL : No. In fact, Caroline's right. You're not, really, even very *like* Freddie.

OWEN (*indignantly*) : Did anyone ever suppose that I was ?

JILL : Well—I had a general idea that most men rather resembled one another, especially in their dealings with women.

OWEN : You were wrong—as you often are.

JILL : Caroline says it may be the saving of us that we're neither of us afraid of the truth.

OWEN : May I ask in what respect Caroline considers us to be in need of saving ?

JILL : I don't know that I can begin explaining that just now. We ought to be starting.

OWEN : We can't start until we've signed our names in that blasted book. Tell me what Caroline meant.

JILL : She thinks you're different, because you've got imagination.

OWEN : Isn't that exactly what I've been trying to make you see all along ?

JILL : You *have* made me see it. Only a man with imagination could have fallen a victim to what you once described as propinquity quite as rapidly as you did on the night of the strike. Or have made quite such a mess of it.

OWEN : Are you more angry because I *did* fall a victim, or because I made a mess of it ?

[*They look at one another, and both burst out laughing.*]

JILL : I'm really angry for the oldest and most primitive reason in the whole world. I never realised before that I was capable of being jealous.

OWEN : Do you know that's almost the nicest thing you've ever said to me ?

JILL : Oh, I could do much better than that, Owen. If you still want me to, that is.

[*They look at one another in silence.*]

OWEN (*gravely*) : I *want* you to say that you'll marry me. I know you're afraid (*looking round the room*) of all *this*. Well, so am I.

JILL : You too ?

OWEN : Of course. Don't you think that's going to be a safeguard ?

JILL : It'll help.



OWEN (*suddenly practical*) : We ought to arrange to spend half a year, at least, away from home. Away from one another, in fact.

JILL : Owen, that's really splendid of you.

OWEN : It is, isn't it ?

JILL : What shall I promise in return ? That I'll never talk to you about the servants ?

OWEN : That you'll never let me go to sleep after dinner over the newspaper.

JILL : No ! I'll make it worth your while to keep awake. (*Gravely*) And I'm not going to let my whole life hinge on personal relationships, Owen. I'm going to keep lots of outside interests when I marry.

OWEN : Right ! Then it is settled that we're to give marriage a trial ?

JILL : It's a risk—but at least we shall be taking it with our eyes open. And——

OWEN : And what, sweetheart ?

JILL : The night of the strike showed me that—I can't face the alternative.

OWEN : What alternative ?

JILL : The only alternative there is when one's dealing with a man who has imagination—watching him fall in love with somebody else.

OWEN : Never ! (*He takes her in his arms.*) You and I, my sweet, are *not* Freddie and Caroline. We're different—we'll always be different.

JILL : I wonder just how many lovers have said that. I wonder . . . Oh, well—Owen !

[*They kiss.*]

FREDDIE (*off*) : They can easily use my fountain pen, dear.

[OWEN and JILL *exeunt* to porch. FREDDIE and CAROLINE, *with Visitors' Book and pen*, enter.]

Hello, where have they got to ?

[OWEN and JILL *re-enter*.]

Ah, there you are. I was wondering where you'd got to.

JILL : Well, I'm afraid we ought to start, oughtn't we, Owen ?

OWEN : If you're ready . . .

FREDDIE : Let me give you a hand with these bags.

OWEN : No, no. . . . (*Picks up a suit-case.*)

[FREDDIE *exits with the other.*

JILL : Don't come out, Caroline. Really you mustn't. I've so loved being with you, darling. Good-bye.

OWEN : Thanks most awfully. It has been good of you. Good-bye.

[*He shakes hands with CAROLINE.*

CAROLINE : Mind you come again.

[OWEN *exits.*

JILL : Caroline, I think it's going to be all right !

CAROLINE : Darling ! (*Kisses her.*)

[JILL *exits.*

CAROLINE *stands looking after her, then slowly turns back into the room again, and stands a moment, rather desolately, looking round. She goes to the sofa, and sits down again, resuming her knitting. The next moment FREDDIE—minus the suit-cases—fusses in at the window. He is followed by JILL and OWEN.*

FREDDIE : They very nearly went off without signing their names in the book after all. Come on, Jill, write your name. Here's the blotting-paper.

[CAROLINE *starts up.*

JILL (*signing*) : There !

FREDDIE : Lucky thing I remembered. Now, Owen—

[OWEN *signs.*

JILL (*to CAROLINE*) : You see—life again ! Always the anti-climax—I will *not* say good-bye all over again.

[*Blows her a kiss and exit by window, followed by FREDDIE.*]

OWEN *lingers behind, with CAROLINE.*

OWEN : Has she told you ?

CAROLINE : She said it was—going to be all right.

OWEN : I feel that too. You know, Caroline, it's all thanks to you.

CAROLINE : Nonsense.

OWEN : But it isn't—and, besides, something you said to her this morning helped her to make up her mind.

CAROLINE : Yes, Jill and I agreed this morning how wonderfully easy it is to throw light on the problems of other people.

OWEN : Did she also throw light on yours ?

CAROLINE : I think so. At least, she made me realise that if one hasn't the courage to rebel, it's wiser to face life as it is, and accept it, than to try and reconcile it with—day-dreams.

OWEN (*impulsively*) : Caroline—forgive me—you said, "If one hasn't the courage to rebel." Are you sure you haven't the courage ?

CAROLINE : Quite, quite sure. Years ago, perhaps—but things accumulate—responsibilities—obligations that one undertakes—— (*She shakes her head.*) It's life, isn't it ? But it will be different for you and Jill. You're starting differently.

[*The engine of the car is started outside.*]

You must go. (*She gives him her hand.*) Good-bye, Owen. The best of luck !

OWEN : Good-bye, Caroline.

[*He looks at her for a moment, then lifts her hand to his lips and exits.*]

CAROLINE stands looking after him. Her eyes are dazed, as though some thought eluded her. She relinquishes it, rouses herself, and goes to her old place on the sofa, taking up her knitting on the way.

FREDDIE returns and starts the gramophone with "*When we are married.*" After a few bars, CAROLINE says with a smile :

CAROLINE : I still have a little headache, Freddie.

FREDDIE : I'm sorry, dear. (*Stops gramophone.*)

[EMMA enters with the newspaper on a tray, which she silently hands to FREDDIE. He takes it with a sound of satisfaction, and tears off the wrapper. Then he, too, subsides into the chair opposite to CAROLINE'S. He unfolds the paper and begins to read.

*Exit EMMA.*

*A pause, then CAROLINE speaks :*

CAROLINE : Anything in the paper, Freddie ?

FREDDIE : Nothing, as far as I can see. This dam' Government——

[*Another pause, then FREDDIE lowers the paper and looks across at CAROLINE.*

(*Slowly*) I've been thinking—if you'd care about it, dear, we might perhaps take a trip abroad in the spring. I daresay a change would do you good.

CAROLINE (*starting into life*) : Freddie !

FREDDIE (*with an obvious effort*) : Yes. What about that place you and Jill are so keen about ? We might take a look at that. Wasn't it the Eiffel Tower by moonlight . . . ?

CURTAIN



# AFTER ALL

Title *Mid Summer Nights Dream*

Author *Armour, A.S.*

Accession No. *1828*

Call No. *822.33*

*MB2 A*

Borrower's  
No.

Issue  
Date

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No.

Issue  
Date

*Pubnagis*

*1925*

*20<sup>12</sup>/<sub>58</sub>*

JOHN VAN DRUTEN

AFTER ALL

*A Play in Three Acts*

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To  
G. B. STERN  
whose is the responsibility

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*After All* was first produced under the auspices of the incorporated Stage Society and the Three Hundred Club at the Apollo Theatre on the evening of Sunday, May 5th, 1929.

Since that production the play has been very largely revised and re-written, the alterations including the entire removal of one character. The present version, however, is the form in which I desire to leave the play.

My grateful thanks are due to all those concerned with the production.

J. v. D.

*After All* was first produced at the Apollo Theatre, London, on May 5th, 1929, with the following cast :

Mrs. Thomas	HELEN HAYE
[Miss Minnister	UNA O'CONNOR]
Ralph	RICHARD BIRD
Mr. Thomas	FREDERICK LLOYD
Phyl	NORAH BALFOUR
Alice	EDITH MARTYN
Mrs. Melville	MURIEL AKED
Mr. Melville	FRED PERMAIN
Duff Wilson	CYRIL RAYMOND
Greta	ELISSA LANDI
Doris Melville	VALENTINE DUNN
Cyril Greenwood	CLIVE MORTON

*The Play produced by* AURIOL LEE

## CHARACTERS

*(in order of speaking)*

MRS. THOMAS

MR. THOMAS

RALPH

PHYL

MRS. MELVILLE

ALICE

MR. MELVILLE

DUFF WILSON

GRETA

CYRIL GREENWOOD

DORIS MELVILLE

•

## SCENES

*The action of the play is spread over about six years*

### ACT I

SCENE I : The Thomases' house in Kensington.  
Mid-December.

SCENE II : The same. Three months later.

### ACT II

SCENE I : The same. Eight months later.

SCENE II : The same. Eighteen months later.

### ACT III

SCENE I : A studio in Chelsea. Three years later.

SCENE II : A house near Regent's Park. Six months later.



## ACT I

### SCENE I

SCENE : *The Thomases' house in Kensington.*

TIME : *Six-thirty on a Sunday afternoon in mid-December.*

*The scene is a large, comfortable, respectable, dignified family sort of room, with a door up stage R. leading to the hall ; windows in the left wall ; curtains now drawn ; fireplace in C. of back wall, with club fender. Their furniture is very much what might be expected, leathery, and not unlike a club sitting-room ; good, prosperous, upper middle class.*

*When the curtain rises, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas are alone on the stage. Mrs. Thomas is working, Mr. Thomas reading "Pepys's Diary."*

*Mr. Thomas is about fifty-seven, a grey-haired business man.*

*Mrs. Thomas is a good deal younger, probably about forty-eight. She is rather pretty, dark-haired, graceful, and nicely dressed.*

*There is silence for a while, and then Mrs. Thomas looks up from her work.*

MRS. THOMAS : Walter. (*Pause*) Dear.

MR. THOMAS (*looking up*) : Eh ?

MRS. THOMAS : Have you thought about Christmas ? We shall have to have the family here.

MR. THOMAS : O Lord !

MRS. THOMAS : We were at Arthur's last year, and James's the year before.

MR. THOMAS : I hate Christmas.

MRS. THOMAS : I know. I believe everyone does.

MR. THOMAS : Nothing to do but over-eat. Christmas Day's on a Monday, isn't it ? That means four clear days wasted.

MRS. THOMAS (*smiling*) : You know, you men are

extraordinary. You always complain that you never get any time away from work, and then week-ends and holidays you wander about the house like lost sheep.

MR. THOMAS : How many shall we be ?

MRS. THOMAS : About fourteen, I think. There's Arthur and Doe, and Doris, and James, and Beatrice, and . . .

MR. THOMAS : Oh, don't catalogue them !

MRS. THOMAS : Well . . . I wish Phyl and Ralph got on better with Doris. But I suppose it's only natural. Cousins never do.

MR. THOMAS : No. I suppose they're all gloating over Phyl's engagement being broken off. What time do you expect her back ?

MRS. THOMAS : In time for supper, I hope.

MR. THOMAS : What's the idea of all this gallivanting around ?

MRS. THOMAS : Nothing. Why ?

MR. THOMAS : I'm worried about her.

MRS. THOMAS : I know, dear. I don't think you've any cause.

MR. THOMAS : I don't understand this engagement business. What's the matter with Gordon ? He's a very nice lad. I can't help feeling there's something behind it all.

MRS. THOMAS : What could there be ?

MR. THOMAS : You never know. A girl gets an idea into her head ; some schoolgirl infatuation. You never know where it'll end.

MRS. THOMAS : Oh, really, dear.

MR. THOMAS : You're worried yourself.

MRS. THOMAS : No.

MR. THOMAS : Oh, yes, you are, but you won't admit it. I don't understand it.

[Enter RALPH. *He is between twenty-three and twenty-four, a nice-looking, jolly young man.*

RALPH : Hello, parents !

MR. THOMAS : Oh, you've come in, have you ?

RALPH : Yes, but I'm going out again quite soon ! Have you been having a nice time ? You look very domestic. Father reading *Pepys's Diary* as usual ; mother knitting by the fire. Only the cat missing. (*He sings*) " We've been together now for forty year, and it don't seem a day too much." How's the Old Dutch ?

[*He kisses his mother.*

MR. THOMAS : What have you been doing all day ?

RALPH : Being social. I lunched at the Richardsons'. He's starting a new paper. I thought if I was very charming he might take some drawings of mine.

MRS. THOMAS : And did he ?

RALPH : Well, not like that. But I think he's kindly disposed towards me. I kissed the baby and said it had his nose. You see, Mrs. Richardson's a Jewess, and I thought that would please him. It went down terribly well.

MR. THOMAS (*laughs*) : And where are you going to do the drawings ? In the office, eh ?

RALPH : I expect so, father. You've got some old Bills of Lading I could use, haven't you. I went on to tea at Peter's. He sent his love.

MRS. THOMAS : He hasn't been to see us for ages.

RALPH : No, he's busy. He's doing some sets for the new revue at the Palace. (*After a tiny pause, awkwardly*) Look here, father, there's something I want to ask you. You know I spoke to you before about sharing rooms with Peter. Well . . . he's just had the offer of a flat in Bloomsbury. We went to have a look at it. It's really rather nice, and . . . it's a bit large for him on his own,

and . . . and . . . well . . . he wanted to know if I'd go in with him. I'd like to. (*This is received in silence.*) Can I?

MR. THOMAS : You mean . . . leave home ?

RALPH : Yes.

MR. THOMAS : Why ?

RALPH : Well, I explained to you. It would be rather jolly, and Peter and I get on well together, and . . .

MRS. THOMAS : Aren't you happy at home ?

RALPH : Yes, of course, mother. (*Flippantly*) Happy as the day is long.

MRS. THOMAS : I can't see why you want to leave.

RALPH : Oh . . . it would be fun . . . give me a chance of meeting people more . . .

MRS. THOMAS : Meeting people ?

RALPH : Yes. Artistes. People in the theatre. Peter knows them all.

MR. THOMAS : What do you want to meet *them* for ?

RALPH : My work. My drawing. They're the sort of people I've got to know. Besides, I like them.

MR. THOMAS (*half humorously*) : I don't.

RALPH : No, I know. That's why I can't ask them home. Besides, here in Kensington . . . this house . . . you and mother. . . . Oh, you know what I mean.

MR. THOMAS (*smiling*) : I know.

RALPH : Well, then . . .

MRS. THOMAS : Who's going to look after you ? You know you've always been used to having everything done for you.

RALPH : There's an awfully good housekeeper



person who lives on the premises. Besides, we shan't want much looking after. Just breakfast in the mornings. We shall have most of our meals out.

MRS. THOMAS : That's so bad for you. Restaurant food. You won't like it, you know, after your own home.

RALPH : No ?

MRS. THOMAS : And your work ? The office, I mean. Who's going to see you get up in time in the morning ?

RALPH : I'll buy an alarm clock.

MR. THOMAS : I know what it'll be. Late hours. Parties every night. Burning the candle at both ends.

RALPH (*brightly*) : I'll be all the fresher in the office the next morning for having had a different atmosphere the night before.

MRS. THOMAS : If your home means so little to you . . .

RALPH : Oh, it's not like that, mother. Besides, Peter will look after me and keep me out of mischief—if that's what you're afraid of. You know how you've always said he was such a nice, steady fellow you could hardly believe he was an artiste or had anything to do with the theatre. Think what a good example that'll be for me. No, but seriously, I'd like to try it, anyway.

MR. THOMAS : Do you really think it's a good idea ? It's only your happiness I'm thinking of. Not just for a few weeks, but . . . you've got your life to make, and . . .

RALPH : Well, going to the office every day and coming back here to dinner every night may be your idea of happiness, but I'm afraid it isn't mine.

MRS. THOMAS : You needn't be rude.

RALPH : I don't mean to be rude, and it's not

that I'm not happy at home, only . . . Well, this is what I want to do. Won't you let me try ?  
(*Pause*) Father ?

MR. THOMAS : I can't very well stop you, I suppose, so long as you live within your salary.

RALPH : Well, can I take it as settled then ?

MRS. THOMAS : Must you decide now ?

RALPH : Yes. Peter's got to let them know to-morrow whether he wants the place. I'd said I'd tell him to-night. I'm going out to a party with him.

MRS. THOMAS : To-night ? You've been out all day. Why must you go out again to-night ? We never see anything of you at all.

RALPH : You'll see a lot more of me when I'm living with Peter, mother. I'll come and visit you. You see, it will be a change for me then.

[*PHYL comes in. She is twenty-two, pretty and resolute.*]

Why, if it isn't little sister Phyllis ! Welcome back to the family circle. Enter the long-lost daughter.

PHYL : Idiot ! Hullo, father.

[*She kisses her father and mother.*]

MRS. THOMAS : Good-evening, dear.

MR. THOMAS : Had a nice week-end, Phyl ?

PHYL : Yes, thanks. The country was looking lovely. All cold and frosty.

RALPH : And how was Sheila ? I remember when she used to come to tea with you in the nursery and quarrel over the doll's pram. And now she's a married woman ! Dear me, how time flies, as Auntie Doe says.

MR. THOMAS : You're a lot better friends with her than you used to be, aren't you, Phyl ?

PHYL (*smiling*) : Yes. Now she's got a country cottage.

MR. THOMAS : Was anyone else there ?

PHYL (*after an almost imperceptible hesitation*) : Just Sheila, Geoff and me. She's expecting a baby. I think she'd like me to go down sometimes. Geoff's away a lot, you know.

MR. THOMAS (*doubtfully*) : Hm.

PHYL : Why ? Don't you like Sheila, father ?

MR. THOMAS : I hardly know her. What sort of people does she know ?

PHYL : I don't know. People. The usual sort. I don't think she knows very many.

MRS. THOMAS : You'd better go and change, Phyl. Uncle Arthur and Auntie Doe are coming in to supper.

RALPH : There now, isn't that a surprise ?

PHYL : Oh, I'm sorry. I'm going out, mother.

MRS. THOMAS : Out ? Why, you've only just come in.

PHYL : Yes, I know.

MRS. THOMAS (*martyred*) : Oh, very well.

RALPH (*chaffing*) : I really should have thought, Phyl, after being away the whole week-end . . .

PHYL (*with a sudden intensity*) : Shut up, you fool !

RALPH (*surprised*) : Oh !

MRS. THOMAS : I don't know why you never can be content to stay at home. (*She rises*) I'll go and tell Alice not to lay for you. I can't bear empty places at table.

PHYL : Mother, you said that exactly as if we'd both died . . . recently . . . and on purpose !

MRS. THOMAS (*ignoring this. To MR. THOMAS*) : Hadn't you better change your coat, dear ?

MR. THOMAS (*rising*) : I suppose so, though I can't really see why.

PHYL : Why is it a man's idea of comfort to wear things that don't match ?

[*Exit MR. and MRS. THOMAS.*]

RALPH : I say, did I put my foot in it just now ?

PHYL : Well, just a bit.

RALPH : Sorry. My sense of humour carries me away sometimes.

PHYL : Oh, is that what it is ? Had a nice weekend, Ralph ?

RALPH : Don't be funny. I broached the subject of going to live with Peter this afternoon.

PHYL : Oh ! Alarums and excursions ?

RALPH : No. The reception was not exactly cordial, but there was less trouble than I expected. It's more or less settled. That was just before you came in.

PHYL : I thought you were unusually cheerful.

RALPH : Well, it wasn't altogether fun. They were a bit hurt. I hate that. I wish they didn't think I was unhappy here. They seem to think I hate home. I don't. At least, not exactly. Only . . .

PHYL : I know.

RALPH : Well, it isn't easy, is it ? Living like this. I know we've all the liberty we want . . . in theory. But it doesn't work out like that. Only you can't explain it.

PHYL : No. Not to them.

RALPH : And talk about home comforts ! All the fuss in the world if anybody comes into a meal unexpectedly because of the trouble it gives the servants. As for asking for dinner ten minutes earlier or later one might . . .

PHYL : You're a lucky devil, getting away. You've no conscience, I suppose, about leaving me alone here ?

RALPH : None, darling. Oh, I saw your



ex-fiancé at the theatre last night. He didn't know whether to cut me or not. We both looked away and met in the middle, so to speak. It was most embarrassing. By the way, I don't know whether I ought to tell you ; I mean I believe I had it in paternal confidence, sort of, but father's been trying to pump me about you.

PHYL : Oh ! What ?

RALPH : Well, I don't know what's at the back of it all, but he doesn't seem awfully satisfied about you having broken it off. He wanted to know if I thought there was anybody else, or you were unhappy. What did I know about it ?

PHYL : And you said ?

RALPH : Nothing. What's it mean, Phyl ?

PHYL : I don't know. (*Pause.*) So they're worrying, are they ? Look here, Ralph, can I tell you something ?

RALPH : I should think so.

PHYL : I'd like to. I've been wanting to.

RALPH : Why ? Is anything the matter ?

PHYL : Well, no, not exactly. Only . . . things aren't going to be altogether easy.

RALPH : Oh !

PHYL : When I told father about Sheila just now, I was sort of preparing the ground . . . for getting away . . . oftener. Do you know what I mean ?

RALPH : No. What ? (*He looks up at her. Pause.*) Oh !

PHYL : Well . . .

RALPH : I see.

PHYL : Are you shocked ?

RALPH : Of course not. Only . . .

PHYL : What ? Ralph, it's not like that. I'm not gone all modern. It's serious.

RALPH : Who ?

PHYL : It's no one you know. But I want you to. I want you to meet him.

RALPH : What's the idea, Phyl ?

PHYL (*with a slightly embarrassed laugh*) : I'm in love. Got it properly. I've not done this lightly, Ralph. Don't think that.

RALPH : I know. You wouldn't . . . somehow.

PHYL : Well, then, can't you face it ?

RALPH : Of course. Only . . . why ?

PHYL : He's married.

RALPH : I see. (*Pause.*) So you *are* unhappy ?

PHYL (*shakes her head*) : No. I'm very happy. That's why I wanted you to know. You see, it's . . . everything.

RALPH : What's going to happen ? A divorce ?

PHYL : There can't be.

RALPH : Well . . . what . . . you're just going on . . . like this ? Is that what you want ?

PHYL : No. Oh, we've talked and talked. He wanted to give it up and go away because it wasn't fair to me, because I can't go and live with him as I'd like to. It's what I'd want more than anything in the world. But he can't leave his wife. She's very ill. And anyway—me—with father and mother. . . . It isn't possible. But I couldn't let him go. (*Pause.*) I said I was happy. I am. But I'm unhappy too. . . desperately . . . that it should have to be like this. It's wrong.

RALPH : Yes.

PHYL : It's going to be pretty beastly here at home. I hate lying. I hate deceiving them. . . . And now if they're worried . . . suspicious . . . but I couldn't ever tell them. It would hurt them so dreadfully.

RALPH : Yes.

PHYL : They couldn't understand . . . with me.

Anybody but your own family. It's hard, even for you to face it. I can see that. But I wanted you to know. I couldn't talk to them about it. I tell you, I'm in love, and it does alter things. It makes me so shy.

RALPH : I suppose it must. I've no experience.

PHYL : Even if I thought they'd understand I couldn't talk to them about it. It wouldn't be . . . decent. Just as they couldn't talk to me.

RALPH : How do you mean ?

PHYL : About that side of their life. How much they're in love, or ever were. Whether they've ever been in love with anyone else. We don't know. We can't. I don't want to know. I couldn't bear it. For instance, supposing you found father had a mistress. . . .

RALPH (*with a laugh*) : Phyl, darling !

PHYL : There you are. It's either funny or embarrassing. And now me . . . I don't want to lie. But they can't know anything like that about me while I'm living at home.

RALPH. No. (*Pause.*) How are you going to . . . manage things? I mean if you're going on seeing him all the time ?

PHYL : God knows. Sheila will help me all she can. She knows about it. He's got the cottage next to theirs. Oh, I know it's going to be beastly . . . lies and suspicion and disapproval . . . but there's no alternative. I can't let him go.

RALPH : I say ! My going off to Peter's isn't going to make it any easier for you.

PHYL : I know.

RALPH : I don't know what I can do, but . . . if there is anything . . .

PHYL : Thanks. But there isn't. I'm glad you know, though. I want you and Duff to be friends.

RALPH : I'd like to meet him.

PHYL : You're not . . . horrified ?

RALPH : My dear !

*[He slaps her affectionately. She smiles at him and goes to the door. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas come in as she reaches it. She passes them.]*

PHYL : I'm going up to change, mother.

*[She goes out.]*

RALPH : I must go too. You'd better tidy the desk, mother, if Uncle Arthur's coming. You know how he loves snooping around, reading whatever's lying about.

MRS. THOMAS : Don't be absurd.

RALPH : I don't know why you pretend to like him. It's only because he's your brother and you think you ought to.

*[MR. THOMAS laughs.]*

MRS. THOMAS : Don't talk like that.

RALPH : Well, you know you don't, really.

MRS. THOMAS : Blood's thicker than water, Ralph. You'll find that out.

RALPH : Yes. So's porridge. Well, so long.

MRS. THOMAS : Good-bye. Shall you be late ?

RALPH : I expect so.

MRS. THOMAS : Why must you ? You'll be fit for nothing in the morning. If you're only going out with Peter . . . do try to be back in good time.

RALPH : Very well, mother. I'll try.

MRS. THOMAS : And don't make a noise when you come in. See you lock up safely.

RALPH : Yes, mother. Good-night. *(He kisses her.)* Good-night, father.

MR. THOMAS : Good-night.

MRS. THOMAS *(as he goes out)* : Have you got the key ?



RALPH : Yes. (*He pauses at the door and then says with difficulty*) Oh . . . thanks about Peter.

[*He goes out. MR. THOMAS sits brooding. MRS. THOMAS goes over to him.*]

MRS. THOMAS : Don't, dear. Don't worry so.

MR. THOMAS : Worry ? Do *you* like it ? His going off like that ? Though a lot of good our worrying does.

MRS. THOMAS : It's only an idea. I don't think it'll last.

MR. THOMAS (*thinking aloud in half-finished sentences*) : What's he want to leave home for ? I don't like all this restlessness . . . always wanting to be on the go . . . parties and . . . I should have hoped this home meant more to him than that. And the office . . . I know he's not happy there. He thinks I'm unsympathetic about his drawing. Well, if I am, it's only for his good. And Phyl. It's the same with her too. All this dissatisfaction . . . going away week-ends . . . broken engagement. . . . There's no peace anywhere any more. We weren't like that.

MRS. THOMAS : We hadn't the same liberty.

MR. THOMAS : The more they get the more they want.

MRS. THOMAS : Remember papa. What a tyrant he was. We've tried to be friends with our children.

MR. THOMAS : And that's how they repay it. I suppose we seem old-fashioned to them, but damn it all, we have lived, and they're children. We do know something about the world.

MRS. THOMAS : I hate your being worried like this.

MR. THOMAS : I sometimes wonder why we had children. What's the point of it all ? You make sacrifice after sacrifice for them . . . to give them a home . . . see they're all right . . . worry yourself to death for them . . . for what ? They don't

appreciate it. They don't want it. I'm not asking for gratitude, but I think they might trust us to know what's good for them. All we want is their happiness. That comes first.

MRS. THOMAS : Of course. That's what they don't realise. Perhaps they'll be sorry for it some day.

*[There is silence. MR. THOMAS relapses into brooding. MRS. THOMAS goes over to him and puts her arm round him.]*

## CURTAIN

## SCENE II

SCENE : *The same.*

TIME : *Three months later. March afternoon.*  
*Curtains drawn back.*

*When the curtain rises, MRS. THOMAS and MRS. MELVILLE are sitting over the relics of a tea-tray.*

*MRS. MELVILLE is a nice, fat, comfortable lady, about fifty-five.*

MRS. THOMAS : More tea, Doe ?

*[MRS. MELVILLE passes her cup.]*

MRS. MELVILLE : I don't think Walter's looking at all well, Margaret.

MRS. THOMAS : I know. He isn't. It worries me. It's his blood pressure. It's all wrong.

MRS. MELVILLE : Why doesn't he see a doctor ?

MRS. THOMAS : He has. Wilkinson. You know what he is. I've been trying to persuade him to see a specialist but he won't. Wilkinson's put him on a diet. No red meat—and he does get so tired of chicken. I rack my brains trying to think

of new things. I wish somebody would invent a new food. No spirits. No wine. He misses it.

MRS. MELVILLE : Is he any better for it ?

MRS. THOMAS : Oh yes, I think so. A little. Wilkinson says he mustn't worry. As if one could avoid it !

MRS. MELVILLE : Is business bad ?

MRS. THOMAS : No. No worse than usual, I suppose.

MRS. MELVILLE : Ralph must be a great help to him. Though I suppose he'll be giving it up for his drawing one of these fine days. It really does seem as if he had a turn for it. Do you see much of him now he's living away from home ?

MRS. THOMAS : Not a great deal. He comes home to dinner once a week.

MRS. MELVILLE : And Phyl ? I didn't think she was looking very well either. She seemed nervy to me. Gordon's not still worrying her, is he ?

MRS. THOMAS : No. She doesn't see him.

MRS. MELVILLE : Is she sorry, do you think, that she broke it off ?

MRS. THOMAS : My dear, I don't know. She doesn't talk to us.

MRS. MELVILLE : Isn't that funny ? But children are like that. They don't seem to realise that their parents are their best friends in the end. Doris is just the same. Not that I think she's got anything she wouldn't tell me.

MRS. THOMAS : How is she ?

MRS. MELVILLE : Oh, she's very well. She's learning typing, you know, and shorthand. She wants to be a secretary.

MRS. THOMAS : Who to ?

MRS. MELVILLE : Well, that depends on what she can get when she has done her training. She'd like to be an author's secretary. But, of

course, a job like that isn't easy to come by. Arthur was all against it. Said she was taking the bread out of the mouths of girls who had to earn their living. But I think a girl ought to have something to occupy herself with. What does Phyl do with all her time?

MRS. THOMAS : I don't know. She's always going out. She never seems to be at home.

[Enter RALPH.

MRS. MELVILLE : Why, Ralph, what a surprise. I didn't expect to see you.

RALPH : I usually come 'ome for me 'alf day on Saturday. . . . Hello, mother.

MRS. THOMAS : Hello, dear. Are you all right? Nice to see you. Would you like tea? (*She pours some out.*) Oh, somebody's been telephoning you. You'll find the number on the block.

RALPH (*looking*) : Oh, thanks. I must ring up. (*Takes up the telephone*) Terminus double seven, double seven.

MRS. MELVILLE : How are you enjoying house-keeping, Ralph?

RALPH : I'd no idea it was so difficult. Really, the prices! Do you know what they asked me for a cauliflower this morning? One and a penny. Would you believe it? And nothing but skin and bone.

MRS. THOMAS (*smiling*) : You *are* absurd.

RALPH (*into 'phone*) : Hello. Is Alma there? Oh, hello. Been trying to get me? To-night? Well, the Richardsons are dining with us. Yes I could come along afterwards. Where? Not before twelve. Fancy dress? Mine's in rags. Oh, all right, then. *Who's* going to be there? Oh, fun! What? Well, we could go on afterwards. Cheerio.

[*Puts down receiver.*



MRS. MELVILLE : You sound a popular young man.

RALPH : Oh, I am.

MRS. MELVILLE : I'm always seeing things of yours in the papers now. Where do you get the jokes from ? The ones you illustrate ? Do you think of them yourself, or do people send them to you ? You haven't had anything in *Punch* yet, have you ?

RALPH : Not yet.

MRS. MELVILLE : Doris is making a collection of them. Sticks them all in a book.

RALPH : I'm honoured.

MRS. MELVILLE : I think they're awfully good.

RALPH : They're not. They're rotten.

MRS. MELVILLE : Oh, you're too modest.

RALPH : I'm not. If I could get some time to work they might be all right.

MRS. THOMAS : Well, if you will spend all your time going to parties . . .

MRS. MELVILLE : Isn't it your birthday soon ? What'll you be ? Twenty-four ? Dear me, how time flies. I must get you a present. What do you want ? Would you like some paints or anything for your drawing ?

RALPH : I've still got the paint-box you gave me when I was six, though I'm afraid the red's all gone. I was too fond of blood.

MRS. MELVILLE : Don't be silly, Ralph. What *do* you want ?

RALPH : Well, I *want* a hair cut, but I never get time.

MRS. MELVILLE : I thought artists always had long hair.

RALPH : I'm not an artist, auntie. I'm a business man.

MRS. MELVILLE : Do you like the business any better now ?

RALPH : Auntie, I once knew a man who was sentenced to penal servitude, and whenever his aunt came to see him . . .

MRS. MELVILLE : Ralph, really. . . . Well, I must be going. (*Rises.*) I suppose it's no good asking you to come to dinner one night with Phyl and your father and mother ?

RALPH : I'm afraid I haven't an awful lot of time.

MRS. MELVILLE : I suppose not. (*To MRS. THOMAS*) We're seeing you at James's to-night, dear, aren't we ? Beatrice has got the Wallaces coming. You know, Mrs. Wallace has got to have an operation. Good-bye, Ralph. Good-bye, dear. Half-past seven, isn't it ?

MRS. THOMAS : See auntie out, Ralph.

[RALPH *and* MRS. MELVILLE *go out*. ALICE *comes and clears the tea*. RALPH *comes back*.

RALPH : Everything all right here ?

MRS. THOMAS : I suppose so.

RALPH : It all sounds very nice and normal. Auntie Doe to tea . . . dining with Uncle James . . .

MRS. THOMAS : Why need you make fun of it ?

RALPH : I wasn't.

MRS. THOMAS : After all, you don't have to do it any more. Though what the family must think I can't imagine.

RALPH : That I'm leading a debauched life. Artists, you know . . .

MRS. THOMAS : What is this party you're going to to-night, dear ?

RALPH : Oh, just a party.

MRS. THOMAS : I see. How explicit.

RALPH : Well . . .

MRS. THOMAS : I'm sorry to seem inquisitive.

RALPH : Oh, mother.

MRS. THOMAS : You're looking tired, dear. Lines under your eyes. It's all these late nights.

RALPH : I don't have very many. Really, I don't. To-night's an exception. Besides, to-morrow's Sunday. Then I can lay in, as the housekeeper calls it. Don't worry about me, mother. I'm all right.

MRS. THOMAS : But I *do* worry about you, Ralph. How can I help it? I wish you didn't resent it so.

RALPH : Mother, I don't resent it. But it's so unnecessary. I can take care of myself.

MRS. THOMAS : So you imagine. I know you think I fuss, but it's your happiness I'm thinking of. And Ralph, I wish you wouldn't speak like that about the business in front of Auntie Doe.

RALPH : Why not? I've never pretended I liked it. I don't know what I'm doing in it.

MRS. THOMAS : Father says you're a very great help.

RALPH : I can stick on stamps. Oh, I suppose it's good for me in a funny sort of way . . . discipline and routine. But it's not much fun.

MRS. THOMAS : Life isn't made up of fun, Ralph.

RALPH (*brightly*) : I can't see why it shouldn't be.

MRS. THOMAS : Don't be childish. One can't do what one likes all the time. You'll find that out. I don't want to sound like a sermon, but I've lived a little longer than you have, dear. One can't always think of oneself in this world.

RALPH : Whom do you want me to think of?

MRS. THOMAS : Oh, you turn everything into a joke.

RALPH : Well, what are you disapproving of?

MRS. THOMAS : I'm not disapproving.

RALPH : Well, what then?

MRS. THOMAS : But I'd like you to realise that there are other things in life than just having a good time. That's all you young people think of. You say you don't like the office. It's what's given you your home, though I know you don't appreciate that—but you might realise that it's been your father's life work, and that it means a lot to him. Where would you be if he'd always done what he wanted?

RALPH : Well, I expect making the business and a home *was* what he wanted.

MRS. THOMAS : And now he's not well. And you worry him.

RALPH : I'm sorry.

MRS. THOMAS : Both of you. You and Phyl.

RALPH : What about Phyl?

MRS. THOMAS : That's what I want to know. She's being very mysterious. Why do you both so resent telling us what you do? (*Enter PHYL.*) Oh, there you are, dear.

PHYL : Hello, Ralph. Where's father?

MRS. THOMAS : In the billiard-room. Do you want him?

PHYL : There's no hurry. I met Auntie Doe waiting for the bus. She seemed a little chilly. Have I offended her?

MRS. THOMAS : You've never bothered to be particularly nice to her.

PHYL : Well, I can't stand Doris.

MRS. THOMAS : I don't know why not. She's a very nice girl. There's nothing wrong with her.

PHYL : No, mother.



RALPH : A very nice girl. She collects my drawings.

PHYL : What a pity it's inadvisable for first cousins to marry.

RALPH : I know. That's why I avoid Doris. I can suffer in silence, but I don't see why she should have to.

MRS. THOMAS : What nonsense you two talk.

[*Enter MR. THOMAS.*]

RALPH : Hello, father. Have you been playing billiards ? Did you beat yourself ?

MR. THOMAS : Yes.

RALPH : Ah, I expect you cheated !

MRS. THOMAS : Have you been cold, dear ? That gas fire doesn't heat the billiard-room properly. I told Alice to put the oil stove in there.

MR. THOMAS : Yes. Beastly, smelly thing.

RALPH : I don't know why you don't get an electric stove.

MR. THOMAS : Because I'm not made of money, that's why.

RALPH (*solemnly*) : Oh, I see.

MRS. THOMAS : Phyl, I want to talk to you about Easter. You know father and I are going to Matlock.

PHYL : I didn't know.

MRS. THOMAS : Well, he wants a holiday, and I thought it might be a good opportunity to get the spring-cleaning done while we're away. I'd like you to come with us.

PHYL : Oh ! Well, as a matter of fact I'd arranged to go down to Sheila's for the Easter days.

MRS. THOMAS : You never told me.

PHYL : I was going to.

MRS. THOMAS : Well, supposing you come up

and join us after Easter. I don't think the maids will be too glad to have you at home.

PHYL : I rather wanted to be in town the week after. I've got things I want to do.

MRS. THOMAS : Well, it's very inconvenient. You know how touchy Alice is.

PHYL : I shan't be any trouble. I can't see that there's any reason why they should upset the whole house. Can't they do one room at a time ? Then I shall have such fun guessing which room I'm going to have breakfast in next.

MRS. THOMAS : Are these things you want to do so very important ?

PHYL : I don't know about that.

MRS. THOMAS : Well then, why not put them off ?

PHYL : I can't. Oh, I can stay with the Lewis's or go to an hotel if it comes to that. But I must say, I think it's a little unreasonable, mother.

MRS. THOMAS : Of course. Everything's unreasonable with you two, if it doesn't fit in with your plans. I've no patience with you.

PHYL : I'm sorry, mother, but is there really any need ?

MRS. THOMAS (*icily*) : No. None at all. It doesn't matter.

MR. THOMAS : I don't think you're being very accommodating, Phyl.

MRS. THOMAS (*to MR. THOMAS*) : Don't bother, dear. It's quite all right. You haven't forgotten we're dining at James's to-night ?

MR. THOMAS : Are we dressing ?

MRS. THOMAS : Beatrice said don't. I shall change into another frock, that's all.

RALPH : Put on a semi. Matron's gown. Black, nigger, putty, rust, beige, puce, and all sombre shades, suitable for mothers of families.

MRS. THOMAS : I'll go up now.

[*She kisses MR. THOMAS's head.*]

RALPH : Be sparing with the gas in your bedroom, dear. I should think it would do if you only had it half on. Well, I must go too. Are you going out, Phyl? Can I drop you anywhere?

PHYL : I've got to dress first.

MRS. THOMAS : Are you going to be late?

PHYL : I don't know, mother. I don't think very.

RALPH : Well, don't make a noise when you come in. (*Acting puzzlement*) Now where have I heard that remark before?

MRS. THOMAS (*to Phyl*) : Would you like some sandwiches left for you?

PHYL (*ironically*) : No, thanks, mother. I'll be a trouble to no one.

RALPH : Trouble to no one ! What a hope you've got ! So long. Good-bye, father.

[*He goes out, followed by MRS. THOMAS.*]

MR. THOMAS (*after a pause*) : I do think you might be a little more obliging, Phyl, and not upset your mother's arrangements.

PHYL : I'm sorry.

MR. THOMAS : I'd have liked you to come away with us. I'd have liked to have you there.

PHYL : Oh, father.

MR. THOMAS : I seem to have lost you lately.

PHYL : Lost me?

MR. THOMAS : Ever since you broke off your engagement you've been different. Are you unhappy about anything?

PHYL : Of course not.

MR. THOMAS : Well, what is it, then? I don't know anything about you any more. You're so

evasive. I don't know where you go, or what you do. What are all these things you want to do in town after Easter ?

PHYL : I've got people to see.

MR. THOMAS : I don't want to pump you . . .

PHYL : Father . . . there's something I've been wanting to say for a long time. It's going to sound dreadful, I suppose, especially after Ralph . . . but . . . I'd like you to let me go and live on my own somewhere.

MR. THOMAS : You, too ? Why ?

PHYL : It's not possible going on like this. This business about Easter is just one example. I think I'm old enough to manage my own life . . . but I can't do it if there's always going to be disapproval and suspicion like this.

MR. THOMAS : Suspicion ? What of ? Who's suspicious ?

PHYL : You and mother. Aren't you ? Every time I go out ? Every time I go away ?

MR. THOMAS : I'm not suspicious. I don't know what you mean.

PHYL : What did you mean just now, then ? You said you'd lost me.

MR. THOMAS : You're so secretive. If I am suspicious, it's your own fault. What does this mean ? What's going on that I don't know ? What is it ?

PHYL (*agitated*) : Father, don't. Don't ask me. Let me go.

MR. THOMAS : Phyl, what is it ? I've been worried about you for months. . . . And now you come and ask me to let you leave home, for no reason. What is it ?

PHYL (*desperately*) : I've got to get away. I've got to put an end to all this.

MR. THOMAS : All what ?



PHYL : All this home business . . . this lying and pretending.

MR. THOMAS : Who has been lying ?

PHYL : I have. Father, I've got to go. (*They stare at each other. The truth is in both their eyes. MR. THOMAS refuses to face it, and looks away from her.*) I have been lying, and it can't go on. I . . .

MR. THOMAS : Don't. Don't tell me.

PHYL : Father !

MR. THOMAS (*after an enormous pause*) : So it's come to that, has it ? That's what all these week-ends away have meant.

PHYL : If you'd only let me explain . . .

MR. THOMAS : I don't want your explanations.

PHYL : No, but you must . . .

MR. THOMAS : Well ?

PHYL (*after a helpless attempt at utterance gives it up*) : What am I to say ? Oh, father, don't . . . don't look like that. I'm serious, father. Oh, you've got to understand. It isn't what you think. (*Desperately*) Father . . . I'm in love. That's why I broke it off with Gordon. . . .

MR. THOMAS : Yes, but . . . why this ?

PHYL : He's married.

MR. THOMAS : My God !

PHYL : I couldn't help it, father. Really, I couldn't.

MR. THOMAS : Don't be blasphemous ! What's going to happen ? Is it all going to be in the papers ? Some beastly divorce case ?

PHYL : No. There'll be no divorce. There can't be.

MR. THOMAS : Can't be ? Why ? You mean to go and live with him ?

PHYL : No. He still lives with his wife. She's very ill. I won't let him leave her. I won't let

him tell her. They've never been happy. They ought never to have married, but he was sorry for her, and . . . well, she wants him there with her, that's all. But I can't be without him. I . . .

MR. THOMAS : Don't. Don't tell me about it.

PHYL : I'd like to think you understood.

MR. THOMAS : I'm your father, aren't I ? Then I can't know . . . anything about it.

PHYL : If you feel like that . . .

MR. THOMAS : Isn't it natural ? (*A long pause.*) Who is he ?

PHYL : His name's Wilson Duff Wilson. He's an architect.

MR. THOMAS (*after another pause*) : And what do you propose to live on ?

PHYL : He'll look after me.

MR. THOMAS : No.

PHYL : Why not ?

MR. THOMAS : No. No, I tell you. No !

PHYL : It doesn't seem fair that *you* should.

MR. THOMAS : You're still my daughter.

PHYL : Yes, but . . . I can't let you keep me. I'm not still your daughter . . . like that.

MR. THOMAS : What do you mean ?

PHYL : This changes everything. If I'm to go away . . . won't you see him ? Talk to him ?

MR. THOMAS : See him ? Your . . . how can I ?

PHYL : What then ?

MR. THOMAS : Well . . . you must have an allowance . . . I suppose.

PHYL : I wish you wouldn't.

MR. THOMAS (*blazing up suddenly*) : A kept woman ! Is that what you want to be ?

PHYL (*angrily*) : Oh ! (*Then pulling herself together*) Why not ? If I were married I shouldn't be. You wouldn't object then.

MR. THOMAS : Don't be absurd.

PHYL : Is it absurd ? I can't see the difference . . . really. He's my . . . (*with a weak gesture*) husband.

MR. THOMAS : Don't talk like that.

PHYL : Well . . .

MR. THOMAS : Is there anything else ?

PHYL : You'll let me go ?

MR. THOMAS : What else can I do ? You can't stay here with this going on.

PHYL : No. Now that we know . . . it wouldn't be . . . decent.

MR. THOMAS : What am I going to tell people ?

PHYL : Tell people ?

MR. THOMAS : Yes. Arthur and Doe. James and Beatrice. What am I going to tell them ? What reason am I going to give for your leaving home like this ?

PHYL : Tell them the truth. I'm not ashamed of it.

MR. THOMAS : No ? Well, I am. Ashamed ? Utterly ashamed !

PHYL : I'm sorry.

MR. THOMAS : That does no good.

PHYL : Tell them what you like. Invent your lie. I'll stand by it.

MR. THOMAS : Are you absolutely . . . heartless ?

PHYL : No. Oh, father, it's so awful ! (*She begins to cry.*) I wish . . . I'm sorry . . . I . . . O God, I wish I were dead.

MR. THOMAS : Don't ! Don't go on like that.

PHYL (*weeping*) : Why has it got to be like this ?

MR. THOMAS (*agitated*) : Don't. Don't cry.

PHYL : Father, can't you face it ? I couldn't help it.

MR. THOMAS : Really !

PHYL : I couldn't. Father, I'm grown up. That's all it means. I'm not still fifteen.

MR. THOMAS : You still are to me.

PHYL : I know. (*Desperately*) Father, I do love him. He's everything that matters to me. Somebody was bound to come along who would be.

MR. THOMAS (*shouting*) : I don't want to hear about it.

PHYL (*subsiding*) : Oh, very well. (*A very long pause. She looks at him and then shrugs her shoulders.*) I'm late. I must go and dress.

[MR. THOMAS *does not answer. She makes a gesture towards him with her hand that he does not see, then gives it up and goes out. MR. THOMAS sits thinking.*

CURTAIN



## ACT II

### SCENE I

SCENE : *The same.*

TIME : *Eight months later. Evening.*

*When the curtain rises RALPH is discovered sitting on the desk, with a bundle of papers on his lap, looking at them. He wears a black coat and tie and dark trousers. PHYL is sitting on the floor also sorting things. She wears a black dress.*

PHYL : I expect it's in the box-room after all.

RALPH : Mother's up there, isn't she ?

PHYL : Um. Is Uncle Arthur coming round again ? You two *do* see a lot of each other these days !

RALPH : I wish father hadn't made us joint executors, or that he'd renounced. Seeing him every day for a week is getting too much of a good thing. Are you staying on, Phyl ?

PHYL : I can't.

RALPH : Uncle Arthur was asking me.

PHYL : Pumping you.

RALPH : I dare say.

PHYL : I've been here nearly ten days. The funeral was a week to-morrow.

RALPH : Well, it's all gone very smoothly, hasn't it ?

PHYL : Yes. Like this. Death makes a difference, doesn't it ? But it wouldn't last. What about you ?

RALPH : Me ?

PHYL : What are you going to do ?

RALPH : Come back here. Naturally. What else ?

PHYL : Are you going to like that ?

RALPH : I haven't thought about it . . . much. I don't suppose so, but what does that matter ? I wish you could be here, too, though. Couldn't you, Phyl ?

PHYL : You know I couldn't. How many times have I been home since I've been in my slum ? Three, isn't it ? You know how impossible that got. Conversation and awkward situations. But I'm sorry about you. You are going to be damnably tied. It's decent of you to do it.

RALPH : Bilge !

PHYL : You've enjoyed being on your own.

RALPH : Yes. Heaps. But that makes no difference. I've got no real reason for not being here except just selfishness. It's different for you.

PHYL : I've been wondering if it isn't just selfishness for me too. You're a lot nicer person than I am, Ralph. It doesn't seem to enter your head that here's your chance to make the final break.

RALPH : What rot ! You know I couldn't do that.

PHYL : No. Lots of men would, though. If you'd been in my shoes I wonder if you would have done what I did ?

RALPH : I hope so. You're not regretting it, Phyl ?

PHYL : No. But one has a conscience.

RALPH : One shouldn't have.

PHYL : You've got one. That's what's bringing you home now. Mine's tearing me. I feel so awful about father. When he was lying there, I wanted to go in and beg his pardon, I did hurt him.

RALPH : So did I, if it comes to that.

PHYL : What do you believe happens afterwards ?

RALPH : Afterwards ? Nothing.

PHYL : Nothing ? Just the end . . . and that's all ?

RALPH : Yes. And you ?

PHYL : I don't know. There must be something more. There must. If Duff died, and I thought he'd just gone out, like a candle, I'd go rushing round looking for him. If I didn't think that he was somewhere . . . that's why I feel so awful about father . . . that he's alive somewhere . . . and that he hasn't forgiven me.

RALPH : My dear old thing, that's nonsense. It's sheer sentimentality. You know, you did the only thing you could do. You've always known that.

PHYL : Last time I saw him before his stroke, it was about two months ago. He took me to the Zoo one Sunday morning, just like he used to when we were little. It was rather horrible. He hardly talked at all, and I felt he wanted to, and couldn't. And I couldn't either. We just stood and made jokes about the animals and then he put me into a taxi and . . . I never spoke to him again. And now I've got to go on hurting . . . mother . . . and his memory . . . and you.

RALPH : Me ?

PHYL : I'm letting you down, leaving you to it. I know.

RALPH : Bilge ! You're out of it. It isn't your show any more.

PHYL (*weeping*) : O God, I do hate myself.

RALPH : Well, stop weeping into the insurance policies. Uncle Arthur wants to look at them.

PHYL (*drying her eyes and smiling*) : What has he said about me ?

RALPH : Well, he's rather been playing " Here we go round the mulberry bush " with the subject. Never quite coming into the open.

PHYL : What *do* they imagine I left home for ?

RALPH : Well, I know what they were told, but I can't answer for what they believe.

PHYL : No. It sounded a bit thin to me, that I wanted to be independent and give dancing lessons. It would have been so unlike father to let me. It isn't going to be any easier for you after you've been ten months away.

RALPH : No. I can't say I'm looking forward to it the hell of a lot. Poor mother, though. God ! It must be awful to have lived with someone you loved for twenty-five years, and have it come suddenly to an end like that.

PHYL : Yes. (*Reflectively*) Yes. All the same, I think she's parading it, rather.

RALPH : Damn it all, it's only a week.

PHYL : I suppose it sounds beastly of me, but I can't bear to look at it. It seems indecent the way she's . . . trading on it. I was fond of father, but when mother carries on as she is doing she just seems to be reproaching us for not having cared enough. That's what I can't stand. Do you know, I couldn't cry at the funeral, because of the way mother did ? And it's going to get worse. I know mother. We'll get over it, and she never will. And she'll never let us forget that we have and she hasn't. Poor Ralph !

[*Enter MRS. THOMAS. She is in mourning, and looks very white and sad. She is carrying some papers.*]

MRS. THOMAS : Is this what you're looking for, Ralph ?

RALPH (*looking at papers*) : Oh. Yes, thanks. It's all here.

MRS. THOMAS : Father was always so methodical. I suppose you two won't be staying much longer. You've been very sweet to me as it is.

PHYL : Oh, mother.



MRS. THOMAS : You've been a very great comfort to me . . . both of you.

PHYL : I'll do anything I can, mother.

MRS. THOMAS : I'm sure you will. Not that there's anything you can do. You or anybody. I'm alone now.

RALPH : I'm coming home, mother.

MRS. THOMAS : You, Ralph ?

RALPH : Yes. If you want me, that is.

MRS. THOMAS : My dear, of course I want you. But you needn't make sacrifices for me.

RALPH : It's not a sacrifice, mother. I'd like to.

MRS. THOMAS : It's very sweet of you. I rather hoped you would. But I wouldn't have asked.

RALPH : That's all right, then. But what about this house ?

MRS. THOMAS : What about it ?

RALPH : Well, I don't know, of course, but I was just wondering. Isn't it going to be a bit big for us ? Just the two of us ?

MRS. THOMAS : Yes. I suppose it is.

RALPH : I wondered if you wouldn't rather take a flat somewhere. I think you might be more comfortable.

MRS. THOMAS : Do you want me to ?

RALPH : I was thinking of you.

MRS. THOMAS : Of me ? I don't want to move. I like this house. We've been here nearly twenty years. I don't want to leave it.

PHYL : Don't you think, mother, you might be less lonely in a flat ?

MRS. THOMAS : You needn't consider that. I shall be lonely anywhere now.

RALPH : I hate to say it, but after all . . . memories and associations . . .

MRS. THOMAS : Memories ? Well, they are all I've got left. Can't I even keep them ? No, I'd rather be alone here than in a strange place.

PHYL : Mother, you mustn't go on feeling like that. You've got to pull yourself together.

MRS. THOMAS : You don't understand, Phyl. You don't know. I hope you'll never know . . . what it is to be left like this. Auntie Doe thinks she can cheer me up . . . she's still got her husband. (*She begins to cry.*) This week. You don't know what it is to sit here alone, as I do . . . waiting. Every evening . . . half-past six . . . and I sit and wait for his key in the front door.

PHYL : Don't. I'll do anything I can, mother. I'll come whenever you want me.

MRS. THOMAS (*warily*) : Yes, dear.

PHYL : I wish you'd let me bring Duff one day.

[MRS. THOMAS *stares at her.*

He'd like to meet you. I wish you'd meet him, mother. (*Horried by the silence in which this is received*) I know you think of him as a sort of monster of wickedness, but surely, after all this time . . . (*She gives it up helplessly.*) If you'd see him I know he'd like to come. He's been frightfully sympathetic. As a matter of fact, those flowers were from him. Those lilies. He wouldn't put his name on them. I wish you could be friends. Won't you let me bring him to see you ?

MRS. THOMAS : No.

PHYL : Why not ?

MRS. THOMAS : No. Your father wouldn't meet him. I'm not going to.

PHYL : Oh, but mother . . .

MRS. THOMAS : And I'd rather you didn't talk about him to me.

PHYL : Mother, supposing we got married ?

MRS. THOMAS : Don't be silly.

PHYL : It's not silly. We will, one day. It mayn't be so very long. I suppose it sounds horrible, but his wife can't live very long. This last year . . .

MRS. THOMAS : How can you ? How can you talk like that ? Waiting for a woman to die . . . when you—you—oh, it's horrible ! And he goes on living with her, deceiving her, praying for her death.

PHYL : No.

MRS. THOMAS : I don't want to hear about it. It's wicked—wicked. And you expect me to meet him—to receive him—to shake hands with him. You broke your father's heart. . . .

PHYL : That's not fair ! That's not true !

MRS. THOMAS : How dare you ! You wouldn't have spoken to me like that when your father was alive. I suppose you think now he's dead . . .

PHYL : Mother !

*[Tears and anger stop her utterance. She presses her hand to her mouth to control herself and turns and walks out of the room.]*

RALPH and MRS. THOMAS are left in a very uncomfortable silence. MRS. THOMAS is weeping.

MRS. THOMAS : Well, what have you got to say ? (RALPH shrugs his shoulders.) You're all I've got left, Ralph. (RALPH comes over and sits on the arm of her chair. She takes his hand.) My boy !

RALPH : Don't, mother.

MRS. THOMAS : All I've got left. What's the use of my life now ?

RALPH : Oh, mother.

MRS. THOMAS : Well, isn't it true ? What use am I any longer ? What is there left for me to do in the world ? Soon you'll be getting married, and then nobody will need me.

RALPH (*trying to pass it off as a joke*) : Well, I haven't seen any signs of that yet.

MRS. THOMAS : It's only to be expected. You can't keep yourself a bachelor for ever.

RALPH (*getting up and singing*) : I'm tickled to death I'm single. (*He stops self-consciously, feeling that it is not a time for singing.*) I'm sorry.

[*There is a long and extremely uncomfortable silence.*]

MRS. THOMAS : I've got to get used to it. I've got to get used to being alone. It's nice of you to come back to me. I know what it means to you. You can't want to, really.

RALPH : Mother, there's something I'd like to talk to you about, if you feel up to it.

MRS. THOMAS : Business ?

RALPH : Well . . . in a way. You see . . .

MRS. THOMAS : Is it that you want to give up the business ? I've been afraid of that.

RALPH : Well . . .

MRS. THOMAS : You *do* want to ?

RALPH : Well . . . yes.

MRS. THOMAS : So soon ? You can come to me so soon ?

RALPH : Mother !

MRS. THOMAS : A week after your father dies, you can come to me with this, that you know he'd have disapproved of. Well, you're free, of course. You're your own master now. I think you might have waited a little longer, though.

RALPH : I'm sorry if I sound impatient, but it seemed to me that now we are settling things up, this was the right time. I think you've always known that I wanted to get out one day.

MRS. THOMAS : And you've just been waiting for your father's death to set you free ?

RALPH : I don't think you need put it like that.

MRS. THOMAS : Oh, I know you've never liked it. But it was your father's business. It meant so



much to him. It was very small when it started and he made it what it is. He'd have hated so to think there would be no one there to carry on.

RALPH : Harrison can carry on. What was he made a partner for ? The business will be all right. You needn't worry. It'll make no difference to your income.

MRS. THOMAS : I wasn't thinking of that. You know that perfectly well. But your father . . . you mean just to give it up and do nothing ?

RALPH : Not do nothing. I want to have time to work properly.

MRS. THOMAS : Work ? Your drawing ?

RALPH : Well, Isn't that work ? No, I suppose you don't think it is.

MRS. THOMAS : I do think some regular occupation . . . It's a demoralising sort of life, an artist's life.

RALPH : Is it ?

MRS. THOMAS : No regular hours—getting up when you like. Not having to work when you don't feel like it. Idling in a studio.

RALPH : I see.

MRS. THOMAS : Oh, I'm not against it, really . . . if it's for your good. It's only *that* I'm thinking of. I think you'd be happier working in the long run.

RALPH : But I shall be working. The work I want to do. After all, mother, I am coming back home to live, and . . .

MRS. THOMAS : Is that such a sacrifice ? Are you trying to bargain with me, Ralph ?

RALPH (*angrily*) : No. (*Repentant*) Oh, I shouldn't have said that, I suppose. But won't you let me ?

MRS. THOMAS : It's not a question of letting you. As I say, you're your own master. It's your life. You've got to decide for yourself. So there's no

more to be said about it. I only hope you won't regret it.

RALPH : Mother, you're not going to go on disapproving for the rest of my life, are you ?

MRS. THOMAS : I shan't be here for the rest of your life, Ralph. That's why you've got to make it for yourself. And, my dear, you know that all I want is your happiness. It's the only thing I've got left to care about. If you're a success, no one will be prouder or happier than I shall.

*[She caresses him. A ring at the bell.]*

RALPH : Oh, that'll be Uncle Arthur. There are some things he wants to see me about.

MRS. THOMAS : Do you want me to leave you ?

RALPH : I don't think so.

MRS. THOMAS : Do try to be more polite to him, dear. You were very rude the other night.

RALPH : Well, he does get on my nerves so.

*[ALICE announces MR. and MRS. MELVILLE.]*

*MR. MELVILLE is a grumpy, dyspeptic man of fifty-five.*

MR. MELVILLE : Hello, Margaret, how are you ?

MRS. THOMAS : Good evening, Arthur. Oh, I'm all right, I suppose. *(He kisses her cheek.)* Good evening, Doe.

MR. MELVILLE : What a filthy evening. Going to be foggy. Really, this bus service is getting awful.

MRS. MELVILLE : That's why we're so late. We waited and waited until at last we had to take a taxi.

RALPH *(involuntarily)* : How dreadful.

MR. MELVILLE *(going on tour of inspection)* : That's a nice bunch of lilies. Where do they come from ?

MRS. THOMAS : I don't know. Oh yes, a friend of Phyl's sent them.

MRS. MELVILLE : Oh, they're lovely. Of course,

I always think lilies are a shade depressing. No, I don't mean depressing, but . . . well . . . you know what I mean. Sort of religious. But they're very lovely.

MR. MELVILLE : Must have cost a small fortune.

MRS. MELVILLE : A friend of Phyl's, did you say ? How very nice of her.

MR. MELVILLE (*picking up a letter from the desk*) : Who's this from, Margaret ?

MRS. THOMAS : What ? Oh ! That's from Connie Saunders. Such a nice letter. She was so shocked to hear about it.

RALPH : I remember Mrs. Saunders. She used to come to your At Home days, when I wore sailor suits. She had a bust, hadn't she ?

MRS. MELVILLE : She was very stout, if that's what you mean.

RALPH : Yes. It used to have a watch pinned to it. I remember I used to be allowed to play with it . . . the watch, I mean.

MRS. MELVILLE : Ralph, dear ! The things you say !

MR. MELVILLE : Well, what are your plans, Margaret ? About the children I mean. What's Phyl going to do ? Is she here ?

MRS. THOMAS : She's upstairs. She's going back to her own place quite soon.

MR. MELVILLE : Oh ! There you are, Doe. What did I tell you ?

MRS. MELVILLE : Oh, but really. . . . You don't mean to say she's going on living in that dreadful little flat of hers. . . . Of course I know people think it's artistic to be uncomfortable nowadays, but now that her father's dead, I really should have thought . . . I never understood her wanting to go away in the first place, but I thought it was very wise of you and Walter to let her try it. I believe in letting young people

find things out for themselves, and then if it goes wrong they've had their lesson, and if it's a success they can't blame you for not letting them try it.

MR. MELVILLE : Rubbish.

MRS. MELVILLE : Well, dear, you know you were all against Doris taking up her typing, and look how happy she's been. If you hadn't let her, she would always have reproached us. I told you so at the time.

MR. MELVILLE : It's all nonsense this idea of girls wanting to be independent. Why can't they wait until they get married ?

RALPH : I shouldn't have thought they would have been so independent then.

MR. MELVILLE : Why do you allow it, Margaret ? Don't you want her here at home with you ?

MRS. THOMAS : I should be glad of her company, of course, but she likes this way of living, and I wouldn't dream of influencing her.

MR. MELVILLE : Huh ! And Ralph ?

RALPH : I'm coming home, uncle.

MR. MELVILLE : Oh, you've had the grace to do that, have you ?

RALPH : I don't think it took much grace.

MR. MELVILLE : No. I thought you'd soon get tired of the other thing. Too fond of your comforts.

RALPH (*viciously*) : Yes.

MR. MELVILLE : Yes. You know when you're well off.

RALPH (*politely*) : Oh, really ?

MR. MELVILLE : Well, at any rate I'm glad to see that *you* know where your duty lies. I've done my best to point it out to you this last week.



RALPH : You have. (*Suddenly losing his temper completely*) Though what the hell business it is of yours I don't know.

MRS. MELVILLE (*faintly*) : Ralph, dear, what a way to speak !

MR. MELVILLE (*furiously*) : How dare you ? What do you mean by that ?

RALPH : What I say. You ! Pointing out my duty to me !

MR. MELVILLE : Well, somebody had got to, apparently, or a nice time of it Margaret here would have had.

MRS. THOMAS : What do you mean, Arthur ?

MR. MELVILLE : Do you think I was going to sit by and see you left alone ?

RALPH : There was never any question of that.

MR. MELVILLE : Huh !

MRS. MELVILLE : Really, Arthur, I think Ralph could have been trusted to know what was right for himself.

MR. MELVILLE (*sarcastically*) : I dare say.

RALPH : You dare say ! You're going to try and take the credit for it, are you ?

MRS. THOMAS : Credit ! I don't want you to make sacrifices for me, Ralph, if you feel there's any credit attached to it.

RALPH : I don't, mother. I've never thought so. . . . But I'm not going to stand Uncle Arthur talking as though he were responsible for my coming home.

MR. MELVILLE : You want the credit of it yourself ?

RALPH : Oh, go to hell !

MR. MELVILLE : Oh ? That's all the thanks I get. Very well. I'll go. You needn't expect me to come here again though.

[*Rising.*

MRS. THOMAS : Arthur ! Ralph ! Really ! Please !

MRS. MELVILLE : Arthur ! You can't go away. You and Ralph can't quarrel like that. You're executors ! How are you ever going to get anything signed ?

MR. MELVILLE : I don't know. I don't care. I'm not going to be spoken to like that.

MRS. THOMAS : Ralph, how dare you ? How can you make a scene like this when I . . . I . . .

[*She cries.*]

MRS. MELVILLE (*soothing her*) : Margaret, don't. He didn't mean it, did you, Ralph ? It's all right. They're only thinking of you. Aren't you ? He didn't mean to upset you. He didn't mean to be rude, did you, Ralph ?

RALPH : No, I'm sorry. I lost my temper. I apologise, uncle.

MR. MELVILLE : Oh. . . . All right (*ungraciously*).

MRS. MELVILLE (*happily*) : There you are !

MRS. THOMAS (*beginning again*) : I know it's a sacrifice for Ralph. And I do appreciate it. I do indeed, Ralph, dear. (*She holds out her hand. RALPH takes it.*) And you too, Arthur. I know you're only thinking of me. I'm sorry to be such a burden to everybody.

RALPH : Oh, mother !

MRS. THOMAS : I am a burden. I know. My life's over. (*She cries.*)

MR. MELVILLE : Now look here, Margaret, you can't go on like that. You're a young woman still. You can't spend the rest of your life moping.

MRS. THOMAS : Moping !

MR. MELVILLE : I know how fond you were of Walter.

MRS. MELVILLE : We all were.

MR. MELVILLE : And I know what his loss means to you. But after all, you've got to carry on.

MRS. THOMAS : Why ?

MR. MELVILLE : For the children's sake.

MRS. THOMAS : They don't need me.

RALPH : Mother, I'm present !

MR. MELVILLE : After all, you've got your friends. . . . You can play bridge. . . .

MRS. THOMAS : Arthur, please. How can I talk about it, when it's only a week ? (*Cries.*) To think that two weeks ago in this very room . . .

*[She cries more.]*

MRS. MELVILLE : There ! There !

MRS. THOMAS (*sobbing*) : Oh, how am I going to get used to it . . . going upstairs alone every night . . . coming down to breakfast every morning. I might as well go to bed and stay there !

*[She breaks down completely, then rises and goes out of the room crying. MRS. MELVILLE follows her, making conciliatory gestures.]*

MR. MELVILLE and RALPH look at each other.

RALPH (*after an awkward pause*) : I'm sorry I lost my temper like that.

MR. MELVILLE : Well, I think it was a bit uncalled for.

RALPH : Yes.

MR. MELVILLE : It's a responsibility for you, my boy. You've been used to having everything your own way. It's going to be different now. You've got your mother to look after.

RALPH : Yes.

MR. MELVILLE : Yes.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

SCENE : *The same, eighteen months later. A few small changes. A wireless set, a slight rearrangement of the furniture. Some flowers in vases. When the curtain rises ALICE is drawing the blinds.*

[*Enter RALPH.*

RALPH : Is mother in, Alice ?

ALICE : Not yet, sir. She hasn't got back.

RALPH (*taking up the evening paper*) : Oh.

ALICE : I expect she's playing bridge, sir. Perhaps it's a long game, and she can't leave.

RALPH : Yes. Oh, by the way, Alice, I shan't be in for dinner to-night. I'm going up to dress in a few minutes. I wonder if you'd mind putting out my things.

ALICE : Very good, sir.

RALPH : I say, there are a lot of flowers about, aren't there ?

ALICE : Mrs. Melville brought them, sir, for the mistress's wedding-day.

RALPH : Wedding-day ? When ? To-day ? Oh, good Lord, I'd forgotten.

ALICE : Yes, sir. Twenty-nine years it is.

RALPH : Oh, damn, I wish I'd remembered. Has Miss Phyl been in, or anything ?

ALICE : She did telephone, sir. But the mistress was out.

RALPH : Twenty-nine years. You've been here a lot of that, haven't you ? What is it ? Fifteen ?

ALICE : Seventeen, next October, sir.

RALPH : How do you think mother is, Alice ? Do you think she's well ?

ALICE : Oh, I think she's pretty well, sir, considering. Of course she's lonely. Never really got over the master's going, you know.



RALPH : Yes, I know. I wish I could do something about it.

ALICE : Oh, I don't think you've any cause to worry, sir. But I mean, this great house . . . when you're out she'll be sitting alone in that big dining-room. . . .

RALPH : I wish she'd move to somewhere smaller.

ALICE : Well, I've thought that too, sir, if I may say so. Oh, she's talked about it to me, often. Says she finds it melancholy here. But I think if the truth were known you'd find she likes it really, in a manner of speaking.

RALPH : Yes.

ALICE : There she is now, sir. She's got her key. I can hear the front door. (*She goes out.*)

[*Enter MRS. THOMAS. She wears a hat, and a coat with fur on it.*]

MRS. THOMAS : Hello, dear. Have you been in long? I'm sorry I wasn't here when you got back.

RALPH : That's all right. I say, mother, I'm awfully sorry I forgot. It's your wedding-day to-day, isn't it? I meant to remember. I'm so sorry.

MRS. THOMAS : That's all right, dear. Why should you remember? It's hardly an occasion I want to celebrate now. It would have been twenty-nine years. . . . We'll have been in this house twenty next spring. I like my links with the past. They're all I've got left. Doe and Beatrice were the only ones who remembered.

RALPH : Have they been here?

MRS. THOMAS : Beatrice came round. She was talking about your drawings. She said she was always seeing your name everywhere now. I think she's rather proud of you.

RALPH : Isn't that nice?

MRS. THOMAS : I am, too.

RALPH : Thank you, mother.

MRS. THOMAS : I'll go and take my things off. You're dining at home, aren't you ?

RALPH : No. As a matter of fact, I'm not. The Richardsons asked me to go out with them.

MRS. THOMAS : Oh.

RALPH : I'm most frightfully sorry, but I'd forgotten it was your wedding-day.

MRS. THOMAS : That's all right.

RALPH : Do you mind awfully ?

MRS. THOMAS : Mind ? Of course not.

RALPH : Why don't you ask someone to come and have dinner with you ?

MRS. THOMAS : At this time of the evening ? Besides, whom could I ask ?

RALPH : Well . . . Auntie Doe, or Mrs. Westcott.

MRS. THOMAS : They've got their own families. It's all right. Don't bother about me. Though what I keep this place up for I don't know. You only use it for bed and breakfast as though it were an hotel. You've been out every evening this week.

RALPH : I was in Tuesday.

MRS. THOMAS : Were you ? Only for dinner. You went out directly after.

RALPH : Oh, very well. I'll put off my engagement for to-night, then.

MRS. THOMAS : Don't be ridiculous.

RALPH : Yes. It doesn't matter. I'll telephone up.

*[He moves to the telephone.]*

MRS. THOMAS : You'll do no such thing.

RALPH : It's quite all right.

MRS. THOMAS : Put that telephone down, Ralph. Do you hear me ?

RALPH (*angrily, putting it down*) : Oh, very well.

MRS. THOMAS : You're behaving like a spoiled child. Go and change.

[*Enter ALICE.*

MRS. THOMAS : Do you want me, Alice ?

ALICE : I've been putting out Mr. Ralph's things, mum, and that dress coat of yours is dreadfully creased, sir.

RALPH : O Lord, is it ? Can you do anything to it ?

ALICE : Well, I might put an iron over it, sir, if you're not too much in a hurry, that is.

RALPH : I've got half an hour.

MRS. THOMAS : If only you would hang your things up properly, Ralph, instead of flinging them about the room in the way you do. What are coat-hangers made for ?

RALPH : For somebody else to put my clothes on. Will you see to it, Alice ?

ALICE : Very good, sir. (*She begins to go.*)

MRS. THOMAS : Oh, and, Alice, I shall be alone to-night. Don't trouble to light the fire in the other room. And don't let cook bother with a proper dinner. I'll have it on a tray in here. What was it we were going to have ?

ALICE : There was the plaice, madam. And the veal cutlets, I think. Oh, and you said after that roes on toast, because Mr. Ralph's so fond of them.

MRS. THOMAS : Yes, well the plaice will be enough for me. Just the tiniest piece. I'm not in the least hungry. And some coffee. That'll be all. I shall probably go to bed quite early.

ALICE : Very good, madam. (*She goes out.*)

RALPH : Why don't you have dinner properly ?

MRS. THOMAS : I can't bear sitting alone in the dining-room.

RALPH : Well, I'd better go and change.

MRS. THOMAS : Yes. Oh, and, Ralph, I wish you wouldn't make such a mess in the bathroom. The state you left it in this morning was a perfect disgrace. And your talcum powder all over the floor.

RALPH : Well, I cut myself. Besides, what do we have maids for ? It's their job to clear up after me, isn't it ?

MRS. THOMAS : You seem to take a delight in giving them unnecessary trouble. And your clothes . . . you know you can't expect Alice to do everything.

RALPH : Sorry.

MRS. THOMAS : And you shouldn't ask her to put out your evening things for you. It's not her work. Surely you can do that for yourself ? Why have you always got to dash in and out like this at the last minute ?

RALPH : O God !

MRS. THOMAS : And don't say " O God." I don't like it.

RALPH : Very well, then. Oh dear, dear, dear !

MRS. THOMAS : Ralph, why do you deliberately try to annoy me ?

RALPH : I'm sorry.

MRS. THOMAS : You're not. You know you're not, or you wouldn't do it.

[RALPH *pauses at the door, comes back, takes up an evening paper, reads in silence for a moment, then he looks up rather repentantly to his mother.*]

RALPH : What have you been doing to-day ?

MRS. THOMAS : Why do you ask ? You know you're not interested.

RALPH : Mother, I'm sorry if I was beastly just now.

MRS. THOMAS : It doesn't matter. Go and dress.



RALPH : No, I'm sorry. I do go out an awful lot, I know.

MRS. THOMAS : But of course. Naturally. I'm not complaining. You've got your own life. You've got your own friends. I wish you could ask them here sometimes instead of always going out. You know I'd be glad to entertain them.

RALPH : Yes, I know.

MRS. THOMAS : Why do you never ask them ? Are you afraid I wouldn't approve of them ?

RALPH : Of course not.

MRS. THOMAS : Oh, I don't suppose they'd be interested in me, but . . . I'd like to meet them sometimes. I do take an interest in your life.

RALPH : I know. I wish you weren't alone so much.

MRS. THOMAS : You needn't worry about me. It's not a son's place to look after his mother. Of course, if Phyl were at home . . .

RALPH (*reminded of something*) : Oh, have you seen her ?

MRS. THOMAS (*martyred*) : She hasn't been near me for the last three weeks.

RALPH : Oh, Alice said she rang up to-day.

MRS. THOMAS : It doesn't matter. I don't expect it any more.

RALPH : No, but look here. I imagine you don't know, but Duff's wife has died.

MRS. THOMAS : Duff ? Oh . . .

RALPH : So I suppose . . . she hasn't felt much like . . .

MRS. THOMAS : When did this happen ?

RALPH : A couple of weeks ago.

MRS. THOMAS : How do you know ? Have you seen her ?

RALPH : No. I heard indirectly. I rang her up, but . . .

MRS. THOMAS : What is she going to do ?

RALPH : I imagine they'll be getting married pretty soon.

MRS. THOMAS : Married ?

RALPH : Yes.

MRS. THOMAS : Married ! Phyl . . . (*trying to realise it*) I can't believe it.

RALPH : But you've always known that one day . . .

MRS. THOMAS : I've never believed it. Your father never believed it. He always thought he'd leave her. And now . . . are you sure ?

RALPH : Sure ? No. . . . She'd no plans when I spoke to her. But they've always meant to get married. I thought you knew that.

MRS. THOMAS : I knew nothing. I knew nothing about it. I didn't want to. But somehow I never thought . . . people in circumstances like that . . . they say they want to get married, but when it comes to the point they're usually not so keen. Two weeks, you said ? Why hasn't she let me know ?

RALPH : Well . . . of course they've known she couldn't live, for months, but when it comes I imagine it's a bit . . . upsetting, all the same.

MRS. THOMAS : Why didn't you tell me ?

RALPH : Well . . .

MRS. THOMAS : Are you sure he wants to marry her ? Poor Phyl, if he doesn't. I wonder if that's why I haven't heard from her. . . . Oh, poor Phyl !

RALPH (*surprised*) : Mother !

MRS. THOMAS : What ?

RALPH : I didn't know you cared like that.

MRS. THOMAS : What do you mean ? Of course I care. Do you think I want her to be unhappy ?

Besides, it's such a dreadful position. Shall I try to speak to her . . . ask her to come round here? Perhaps she doesn't like . . .

RALPH : Ring her up by all means. I'm sure it's all right, though. I say, I must go. I shall be late.

*[He dashes out. MRS. THOMAS left alone stands staring in front of her, anxious and worried. Then she goes to the telephone.]*

MRS. THOMAS : I want Museum 3698. *(She holds on.)* Is that Museum 3698? Could I speak to Miss Thomas, please?

*[The door opens. PHYL comes in. She wears a dinner frock and cloak.]*

PHYL : Hello, mother.

MRS. THOMAS *(turning)* : Phyl ! I was just telephoning you. *(Into the 'phone)* Oh, it's all right, thank you. Miss Thomas has just come in. I'm sorry to have troubled you. *(She puts down the receiver, turns to Phyl and kisses her warmly.)* Phyl, dear.

PHYL : Mother, I've news for you.

MRS. THOMAS : Yes?

PHYL : Duff and I are going to be married. His wife died . . . two weeks ago.

MRS. THOMAS : I know. Ralph told me just now.

PHYL : Well?

MRS. THOMAS : Well?

PHYL : Aren't you glad?

MRS. THOMAS : Glad?

PHYL : That it's happening at last?

MRS. THOMAS : Why didn't you let me know?

PHYL : I couldn't . . . before. These last two weeks have been pretty . . . subdued. It was all rather horrible. We only decided to-day. It's to be Thursday week. At a registry office . . . just very quietly.

MRS. THOMAS : You really are ! (*She breaks into tears.*)

PHYL : Why, mother, what's the matter ? Surely you can't still . . . you can't still refuse to recognise him ?

MRS. THOMAS : It's so . . . extraordinary. I can't realise it.

PHYL : No, I know. When you've waited for a thing like this . . . but it's not going to make any difference, really.

MRS. THOMAS : You . . . married. When I never thought . . . Oh, Phyl. . . . (*She cries again.*) What would your father have said ?

PHYL (*going hard*) : I don't know. I hope he'd have been glad. I hoped you'd be.

MRS. THOMAS : But my dear . . . Phyl ! Are you sure you'll be happy with him ?

PHYL (*coldly*) : We've lived together for over two years. (*Relenting*) Oh, mother, I don't mean to be beastly, only . . . You'll come to the wedding ? Just you and Ralph. Oh . . . and Alice, of course. I don't want anyone else.

MRS. THOMAS (*dubiously*) : Yes. Yes, of course.

PHYL : Don't you want to ?

MRS. THOMAS : My dear, how can I say ? Your wedding . . . like that . . . all hushed up and secret . . . as though . . . as though . . .

PHYL : Did you want a choir, and veils, and orange-blossom, and trains of bridesmaids ? As a matter of fact I'd rather have liked it myself . . . once. But it's all different now. You will come ?

MRS. THOMAS (*smiling, tearful*) : Yes.

PHYL : Thanks. (*She kisses her.*) Mother, Duff's outside in the car. Will you see him ?

MRS. THOMAS : Now ?

PHYL : Yes. Will you ? He'd like to, so much.

MRS. THOMAS : Oh, but Phyl . . .



PHYL : What ? Why not ? If you're coming to the wedding . . .

MRS. THOMAS : Yes, but like this. . . .

PHYL : Please do, mother. Let him come in. I'd hate to go away without your seeing him . . . now.

MRS. THOMAS : But it's so extraordinary. I've never met him.

PHYL : I know. But now . . . You're not going to hold all that against him . . . all these last two years ?

MRS. THOMAS : No. No, of course not. Only . . . well, I can't forget. Don't you wish you'd waited . . . now ?

PHYL (*hard*) : No, I don't. (*Relenting*) Won't you let me bring him in ? (*Smiling*) Remember, he's my fiancé now. I think you ought to meet him.

MRS. THOMAS (*after a pause, smiles*) : Very well.

PHYL : Thanks. You'll like him. I'll go and fetch him.

[*She goes out. MRS. THOMAS remains quite still, bewildered. Then she becomes conscious of her hat and dress. She rings the bell. ALICE appears.*]

ALICE : You rang, madam ?

MRS. THOMAS : Yes. Just straighten the room, Alice, and make up the fire. Miss Phyl's bringing a friend in. I must go and tidy myself.

[*She goes out rather quickly. ALICE proceeds to mend the fire, shake cushions, straighten papers, etc. PHYL and DUFF come in. DUFF WILSON is a man of about thirty-eight, humorous, attractive, and extremely charming. He wears a dinner jacket.*]

PHYL : Oh, where is mother ?

ALICE : She's just gone to tidy, miss. She'll be back in a moment.

PHYL : I see. Oh, and Alice, this is my fiancé. We're engaged to be married.

ALICE : Well . . . I do congratulate you, Miss Phyl.

PHYL : Thank you, Alice.

ALICE : And you too, sir. I'm sure I'm very pleased.

DUFF : Thank you. So am I.

ALICE : I'm sure I hope you'll be very happy.

PHYL : Thank you, Alice. I'm sure we shall. Alice is our family retainer, Duff. Long and trusted service. I was still in the nursery when Alice came.

ALICE : Yes, miss. It seems like yesterday.

PHYL : Does it ?

ALICE : And to think of your getting married now. Though I'm sure I don't know why you haven't before. I've often wondered . . . but then, there's only one Mr. Right, isn't there ?

DUFF : I hope so.

ALICE : How pleased the mistress will be. If only the master could have known.

PHYL : Yes.

ALICE (*collecting herself*) : Well, I'm sure I wish you every happiness, miss.

PHYL : Thank you, Alice. (ALICE *goes out.*)

DUFF : Nice old thing.

PHYL : Yes. She's a darling.

DUFF : And also what is technically known as a treasure ?

PHYL : Yes. A bit of a buried treasure sometimes. (*Pause.*) So mother's gone to tidy herself . . . for you.

DUFF : I'm honoured. So this is your home.

PHYL : Yes. It's queer . . . your . . . our . . . being here together. This is where all the rows took place. It's true to type, isn't it ? You should see

the drawing-room. All gilt chairs and water-colours. I used to think it perfectly beautiful.

DUFF (*smiling*) : I know. We had a chandelier at home that I thought was the most thrilling thing in the world. And when I was about six I fell in love with a lady in a pantomime because she wore a dress all made of gold sequins. I couldn't imagine a lovelier frock.

PHYL : I'm glad your taste has changed.

DUFF : Wouldn't you like one? Just to wear when we're alone at home?

PHYL : I'd take care we never should be. It's going to be funny having dinner across a table like a proper married couple, after all these years of restaurants or sausages on the gas-ring at the slum.

DUFF (*teasing—mock sentimental*) : Our home, Phyl.

PHYL : I wish I could get sentimental about it. I'm only dreading the housekeeping.

DUFF (*smiling*) : Does it mean nothing to you that we're to be man and wife?

PHYL : Nothing, I'm afraid. Oh, I shall probably flood the place on our wedding-day . . . unless mother does. I'm horribly sentimental, but I never can manage it at the same time as anyone else. I came in here all bright and girlish, prepared to do the "Mother, I'm going to be married" stunt perfectly beautifully just now . . . meaning it too, and then she dried me right up. Started crying and talking about father. I went all hard. I'm afraid I was rather beastly.

DUFF : I know. Parents do that to you.

PHYL : Be nice to her, though. Make her like you. Exercise your charm.

DUFF : Oh, I will. It works terribly well on old ladies.

PHYL : Good Lord ! She's not an old lady. You don't expect grey hair and mittens, do you ? She's only about fifty and she doesn't look that. You mustn't stroke her hand.

DUFF : You don't suggest I slap her on the back ?

PHYL : Just try ! (*Pause.*) I wish I were more thrilled about you, Duff.

DUFF : What do you mean ? Do you wish it were all going to be shy and formal . . . you presenting your young man ?

PHYL : It'll be shy and formal all right. Mother will see to that. No, but . . . I'm so jolly used to you. I feel I'm being cheated out of something. A thrill I've missed.

DUFF : Well, if you'd like to find someone else . . .

PHYL (*mock-mournfully*) : I never shall. I know that, now . . . after over two years of you.

DUFF : There's only one Mr. Right . . . as Alice said ?

PHYL : Exactly.

DUFF : Mean it ?

PHYL : Afraid so. (*He puts his arms round her and kisses her.*)

DUFF : Thank you, Phyl.

PHYL : Don't mention it. (*She pats his cheek.*) Pleasure, I assure you. (*Smiles and whispers*) Dear !

[*Enter MRS. THOMAS. She has taken off her hat and tidied herself. There is an awkward moment as she comes in.*]

Oh, mother, this is Duff.

MRS. THOMAS (*with her At-Home-day manner*) : How do you do ?

DUFF (*very charmingly*) : It's awfully nice of you to let me come. I'm afraid it's hardly the right



hour for a call. I hope we're not disturbing you.

MRS. THOMAS : Of course not. Let's sit down. (*They do.*) Did you bring me those lovely roses I found in the hall?

PHYL : He did.

MRS. THOMAS : They're beautiful.

DUFF : I'm glad you like them.

MRS. THOMAS : I think you sent me some flowers before . . . when my husband died. I've never thanked you for them.

DUFF : Oh, please.

MRS. THOMAS : It was very nice of you. (*An awkward pause.*)

DUFF : I'm afraid you must think very unkindly of me, Mrs. Thomas. I've caused you a great deal of pain, I know. I hardly feel that I can . . . apologise, but I would like to say how sorry I've been. . . .

MRS. THOMAS : Please, don't let's talk of the past.

[*Enter ALICE with three glasses of sherry on a tray.*  
Will you have some sherry? I'm afraid we're not very good at cocktails, unless Ralph's here to make them.

DUFF : Thank you.

[*He takes one, and so do MRS. THOMAS and PHYL.*  
*ALICE goes out.*

MRS. THOMAS (*raising her glass*) : I'll drink to your happiness.

PHYL (*subdued*) : Thank you.

DUFF : And to your share in it, please.

MRS. THOMAS : That's very nice of you. (*They drink.*) I think you said it was to be soon . . . your wedding?

DUFF : Yes. Though it's hardly to be a wedding.

Just a registry office. But we both want you to come . . . if you will.

MRS. THOMAS : Of course. I shall be very happy. And what are your plans ?

DUFF : Well, I think we both want a holiday.

MRS. THOMAS : You mean a honeymoon ?

DUFF (*accepting it*) : A honeymoon. We're going to Italy ; we believe in doing the proper thing.

MRS. THOMAS : I spent my honeymoon in Italy.

DUFF : All the best people do.

MRS. THOMAS : It was so beautiful. I've often wanted to go back, but my husband wasn't very fond of travelling.

DUFF (*politely*) : Oh yes. . . .

MRS. THOMAS : And when you come back, where . . . where are you going to live ?

DUFF : I don't know. I'm getting rid of my own house. I've never liked it very much. And we want to start everything . . . afresh. (*He takes PHYL's hand.*) Perhaps you'll help us house hunt.

MRS. THOMAS : If you think I should be any use. I'd be very glad to do anything I can.

PHYL : Please, mother. And I want you to help me to get my things—clothes and everything.

MRS. THOMAS : You'll have a lot to do.

PHYL : Yes.

DUFF : I think the house had better come first. You don't want an elaborate trousseau. You can get clothes in Paris on our way to Venice.

MRS. THOMAS : Venice is so lovely.

DUFF : Yes. It does exactly what's expected of it. (*A long pause.*) When we're settled, we hope you'll come and see us very often.

MRS. THOMAS : You won't want *me*.

DUFF : Well, we shan't be exactly newly-weds.

Oh, I suppose you'd rather I didn't refer to that?

MRS. THOMAS : I think we'd all better try and forget it.

DUFF : If you feel like that about it. But . . . Phyl and I have been very happy. I don't think *we* want to forget it.

MRS. THOMAS : No.

PHYL : You'll have to help me to arrange my dinner-parties.

MRS. THOMAS : I'm sure Mr. Wilson can do that.

DUFF : I'd be very glad if you'd relieve me ; and I don't awfully like being called Mr. Wilson.

MRS. THOMAS (*embarrassed*) : Oh . . . it's a little sudden.

DUFF : I hope you won't feel like that about it for long.

MRS. THOMAS : I'm sure I shan't.

PHYL (*going to her*) : I'd like us to be friends, mother.

MRS. THOMAS : Of course, dear.

PHYL : That's right.

[*A complete silence falls. DUFF takes out his cigarette case. MRS. THOMAS becomes aware of it.*]

MRS. THOMAS : Oh, please don't smoke your own. There are plenty here. (*She looks round vaguely.*)

DUFF : It's quite all right. Won't you?

[*Offers case. She takes one.*]

RALPH *bursts in. He wears trousers and vest and a dressing-gown over it. He is heard calling before he gets into the room.*

RALPH : Mother ! Mother ! I can't find those studs of mine—those new ones—anywhere. (*He stops on seeing DUFF.*) Good Lord ! Duff. You here ?

MRS. THOMAS : Oh, of course. You know each other.

DUFF : Yes. I've come to call. How are you, Ralph ?

RALPH : Damned annoyed at the moment. Mother, I can't think where they are. You haven't sent them to the laundry, have you ?

MRS. THOMAS : No. Of course not. Have you asked Alice ?

RALPH : Yes. She's been turning everything upside down. She can't find them either.

MRS. THOMAS : Oh, they must be there. Have you looked in that red box ?

RALPH : I've looked everywhere. Even in the dirty clothes basket.

MRS. THOMAS : When did you wear them last ?

RALPH : I don't remember. Tuesday, wasn't it ? When does the laundry go ? Oh, but you count it, don't you ? You'd have noticed. They must be somewhere. Only I can't find them.

MRS. THOMAS : If you'd only put your things away properly.

RALPH : Yes, well I want them now. I wish you'd come and help me look.

MRS. THOMAS : Oh, very well. (*To DUFF*) Will you excuse me ?

DUFF : Would you like me to join the search ?

MRS. THOMAS : I wouldn't dream of letting you see Ralph's bedroom. It's far too untidy. Really, Ralph, you are a nuisance about your clothes. (*She goes out.*)

RALPH : This house ! God, you are lucky, Phyl. I think it's so nice for a young man to have his home ! (*He is about to go and then turns.*) Oh, by the way, what *are* you doing here ?

PHYL : Come to announce our wedding. Keep Thursday week.



RALPH : Oh ! Congrats . . . if one does.

DUFF : Thanks.

RALPH : Brave of you to come. Was it very awful ?

DUFF : Not very. We were grateful for the interruption, though.

RALPH : Quite unintentional, I assure you.

MRS. THOMAS (*calling*) : Ralph, if you want me to look for those things you might come and help me.

RALPH : So long. See you soon. Oh, what do you want for a wedding present ? Fish knives ?

DUFF : No. We use our fingers ! (*Exit RALPH.*) Domestic interior.

PHYL : Yes. Quite like old times. I used to join in the search. Shall I have to look for yours ?

DUFF : Naturally. You will also have to count the washing.

PHYL : Oh, that *will* be a thrill.

DUFF : How do you think I managed it ?

PHYL : Beautifully. What did you think of mother ?

DUFF : She's nice. A bit rigid, isn't she ?

PHYL : Well, the situation wasn't easy. Poor mother. (*Smiling*) I believe you were a little hurt that she wouldn't call you Duff. Didn't you rather hope she'd weep and ask you to call her mother ? She's not like that, you know.

DUFF : No. So I noticed. I shall try telling her I'm an orphan.

PHYL : It won't work. She hates orphans. By the way, did you mean that about her coming to see us often ?

DUFF : If you'd like her to.

PHYL : I would, for her sake. You're a good boy, Duff.

DUFF : Shall we ask her out to dinner with us to-night ?

PHYL : N . . . no. I think that would be rushing it. Go slow.

DUFF : Does Ralph go out a lot ?

PHYL : As much as he can. He's a bit tied. And mother always makes him report when he comes in. Go to her room to say good-night.

DUFF : Good Lord ! Mine used to do that, too, until I stopped it.

PHYL : How ?

DUFF : Rather brutally, I'm afraid. I just didn't one night, and explained next morning that I'd been too tight. It wasn't true, but it broke the habit. I had to.

PHYL : Yes. Ralph could never do that, though. You can understand his Bohemian complex now, can't you ? Why the studio type attracts him so ?

DUFF : By way of contrast, yes. I should think he's had enough domesticity to last a lifetime.

PHYL : Give me my coat, Duff. We'll be ready to move.

[DUFF takes PHYL's cloak and helps her on with it. Turns her round and looks at her.]

DUFF : Oo . . . Got a smut on your nose. (*Takes out his handkerchief*) Spit ! (*She spits and he rubs her nose.*)

PHYL : All gone ? Nice clean girl ?

DUFF : Grubby little beast ! Why can't you keep yourself clean ?

[*Re-enter* MRS. THOMAS.]

MRS. THOMAS : Of course they were right under his nose all the time. Really, I've no patience with Ralph.

PHYL : We must be going, dear.

MRS. THOMAS : Must you ? I'm so sorry. You must forgive this little domestic scene.

DUFF : I know what they are.

MRS. THOMAS : Are your parents alive ?

DUFF : No. They've been dead for years. I'm an orphan.

MRS. THOMAS : Oh, I'm sorry.

PHYL (*winks at DUFF*) : Well, good-bye, mother darling. I'll ring you up very soon. (*She kisses her.*)

MRS. THOMAS : Good-bye, dear. (*She turns to DUFF*) Good-bye. Perhaps you'll both come and dine here one night.

DUFF : Please, I should like to. Good-bye.

MRS. THOMAS : Good-bye.

[DUFF and PHYL go out. MRS. THOMAS takes them to the door and then comes back. ALICE comes in with the tablecloth and a tray, and begins to set a little table which she brings in front of the sofa before the fire.]

ALICE : Miss Phyl's told me the news, mum. He seems a nice gentleman.

MRS. THOMAS : Yes.

ALICE : Not a young man, is he, madam ?

MRS. THOMAS : He's not old. He's a widower.

ALICE : Is he, mum ? Well, that does seem strange. Miss Phyl marrying a widower. Has he any children ?

MRS. THOMAS (*rather taken aback*) : Er—no. I don't think so.

ALICE : Well, that's just as well. It's never easy for a step-mother, is it ? Especially if she's as young as Miss Phyl. Has he been a widower long ?

MRS. THOMAS : No. Not very.

ALICE : Well, I'm sure I'm very glad. You must be, too. Are you ready for your dinner now, madam ?

MRS. THOMAS : What's the time ?

ALICE : It's half-past seven. Just on.

MRS. THOMAS : Yes. Well, you can bring it in when it's ready.

[RALPH *bursts in fully dressed, carrying opera hat, overcoat and scarf.*

ALICE *goes out.*

RALPH : Good-bye, mother. I'm fiendishly late. I wish you weren't alone like this.

MRS. THOMAS : That doesn't matter.

RALPH (*putting on his coat*) : Why didn't you ask Phyl and Duff to stay ?

MRS. THOMAS : Oh, I couldn't.

RALPH : Too much trouble for the maids ?

MRS. THOMAS : No.

RALPH : Not enough food ?

MRS. THOMAS : Of course not.

RALPH : Well then, why didn't you ? Didn't you want to ?

MRS. THOMAS (*helping him on with his scarf*) : Well, I did think of it, but after all it's the first time I've met him, so I couldn't.

RALPH : Did you like him ?

MRS. THOMAS : He seemed very nice.

RALPH : He's a good fellow.

MRS. THOMAS : Do you know him well, then ?

RALPH : Pretty well.

MRS. THOMAS : I never imagined him a bit like that.

RALPH : I simply must go. Good-night, mother.

MRS. THOMAS : Good-night, Ralph. Come and see me when you come in.

RALPH : Oh, but I shall be late.

MRS. THOMAS : Never mind. You know I never go to sleep properly until I know you're in. Come to my room.

RALPH : All right. But I don't want to disturb you.



MRS. THOMAS : I shall be awake.

RALPH : Oh, very well then. So long. (*He kisses her.*)

MRS. THOMAS : Good-night, dear. Enjoy yourself. Don't forget to lock up. Got the key?

RALPH (*patiently*) : Yes.

MRS. THOMAS : Are you sure? You'd better look and see.

RALPH (*feeling in his pockets*) : Behold.

MRS. THOMAS : That's all right, then. I didn't want you to be locked out.

RALPH : Good-night, mother. (*He goes.*)

*[She picks up the evening paper and looks at it absently. ALICE comes in with a tray and puts it in front of her.]*

ALICE : Are you sure that's all you'll want, mum? There isn't very much there.

MRS. THOMAS : More than I shall want.

ALICE : That sherry ought to have given you an appetite. It's cosy in here with the curtains drawn. And a fire's always company, I think.

MRS. THOMAS : Yes. I like a coal fire.

ALICE : There's a nice programme on the wireless to-night, mum. Symphony concert.

MRS. THOMAS : Is there?

ALICE : Yes, mum. But not till nine o'clock.

MRS. THOMAS : I don't think I shall sit up.

ALICE : I'll see to the fire in your bedroom, mum. (*She goes.*)

*[MRS. THOMAS lifts the cover of a dish and looks at it with a dejected lack of interest. She helps herself, eats a couple of mouthfuls, then lays down the knife and fork, and sits staring into the fire.]*

CURTAIN

## ACT III

### SCENE I

SCENE : *A studio in Chelsea, three years later. There is very little furniture. A drawing desk for RALPH. Drawings, lay figures, busts, etc. ; a backless divan, and a shabby sort of model's throne. A door leading to the house, up stage R. ; a door leading to the street, back ; a little gas-fire, down stage R.*

*When the curtain rises, RALPH is sitting on the divan. He is now about thirty, but still looks very youthful. He wears rather shabby working clothes, flannel trousers, a pull-over and an old jacket. MRS. MELVILLE is sitting on the model's throne. She looks a good deal older and greyer.*

MRS. MELVILLE : Well, it is nice to see you again after all this long time, Ralph dear. I've been meaning to write to you ever since I came back from abroad, but I know how busy you must be now that you've become so famous. I expect you know all the celebrated people. I thought you wouldn't want to be bothered with your old auntie. And then, this afternoon, when I was at the Flower Show, I thought here I was in Chelsea, and you just round the corner, why shouldn't I look in ? So I did.

RALPH (*sincerely*) : I'm very glad you did.

MRS. MELVILLE (*nodding at him*) : Nearly two years since I've seen you. I believe the last time was at your mother's funeral.

RALPH : Yes. I believe it was. (*Genuinely*) Auntie, I've never had a chance to say how much I appreciated all you did for her while she was ill.

MRS. MELVILLE : Oh, Ralph dear.

RALPH : I don't know what she'd have done without you.

MRS. MELVILLE : I don't know what she'd have done without *you*, Ralph.

RALPH : I do feel I've awfully taken things for granted. Kindness, and that sort of thing. I don't know why, but I've only just begun to appreciate it, lately. I've been awfully selfish and remiss. I never wrote to you when Uncle Arthur died.

MRS. MELVILLE : Well, I went abroad almost immediately. You didn't know where I was.

RALPH : I could have found out. Did you like Florence ?

MRS. MELVILLE : Oh, it was very beautiful, and we found such a nice *pension*. Really, it wasn't like being in a foreign country at all. And that's where I read about your marriage, in the paper, and saw your photograph and your wife's. I must say she looked very pretty, though of course those photographs aren't anything to go by. What a shame your mother never knew her. Or did she ?

RALPH : No.

MRS. MELVILLE : You met her after she died ? It couldn't have been a long engagement then. You've been married nearly a year.

RALPH : We were only engaged a fortnight.

MRS. MELVILLE : Well, that's the way young people do things nowadays. I expect it was very romantic.

RALPH : I wish she'd come in. I'd like you to meet her.

MRS. MELVILLE : I'd like to, too. You know how interested I am in anything you do, Ralph. To think of *you* being married, and a famous artist. And Phyl with two babies and another on its way. Dear me, how time flies ! It makes me feel a very old lady. Do you know, I'll tell you a secret. I'm going to be sixty on Saturday week. I suppose you wouldn't come and have dinner with us that night—and bring your wife : I should like it so much.

RALPH (*genuinely*) : Yes, auntie, I'd love to.

MRS. MELVILLE : Oh, that will be nice ! I suppose there are no signs of a family with you, Ralph ?

RALPH (*smiling*) : I'm afraid not. You've got two great-nieces already, and another on its way. What do you want with more ?

MRS. MELVILLE (*smiling*) : Well, you can't have too much of a good thing. But I suppose you think children are an awful nuisance. You're probably very glad to be without them.

RALPH : I don't know about that, auntie.

MRS. MELVILLE : Somehow I can't picture you as a family man.

RALPH : I'm surprised at myself, sometimes.

[*Enter GRETA. She is about twenty-eight, dark and very lovely in a sulky sort of way, and quite marvellously dressed.*]

GRETA : Oh ! Hello, Ralph.

RALPH : Hello, dear ! Splendid ! This is lucky. Auntie, this is Greta. Greta, this is Auntie Doe.

MRS. MELVILLE : How do you do ? I've wanted to meet you for ever so long, but I've been living abroad ever since Ralph got married. This is the first time I've seen him for nearly two years.

GRETA : Oh really ? Have you been raking up old times ? It's his favourite hobby. I never knew anyone so attached to his past. It's quite an obsession with him. I think he must have been a perfectly hateful child.

MRS. MELVILLE : Oh dear no. You're quite wrong. He was a dear little boy.

RALPH : There now !

GRETA : His mother seems to have spoiled him pretty badly.

MRS. MELVILLE : Well, I don't think it did him any harm. I expect you spoil him now.



GRETA : Well, perhaps.

MRS. MELVILLE : Do you know, I always had an idea you'd marry an actress, Ralph. You always liked that kind of thing.

RALPH : Greta wasn't an actress. At least, not exclusively. She's been about everything that it's possible to be. Shop-assistant, photographer's model, dancing instructress, driven cars, been on the stage . . .

MRS. MELVILLE : Dear me. I expect it was very interesting.

GRETA : Well, it's all experience.

MRS. MELVILLE : I don't think I ought to stay any longer now. I want to go and look in on Phyl.

GRETA : Has her infant arrived yet ? When does that come off ?

MRS. MELVILLE : Almost any time now.

GRETA : Well, I hope she enjoys it.

MRS. MELVILLE (*surprised and shocked*) : Don't you want children ?

GRETA : No. I do not !

MRS. MELVILLE : Oh, how very strange. But I expect you will when they come. Well, good-bye. You won't forget Saturday week, will you, Ralph ? (*To GRETA*) You're both coming to dinner with me.

GRETA : Oh, are we ?

MRS. MELVILLE : Yes. It's my birthday. It'll be so nice to have you. Is roly-poly still your favourite pudding, Ralph ?

RALPH : I haven't had it for years.

GRETA : It doesn't suit my figure.

MRS. MELVILLE : Well, you shall have it when you come to me. Good-bye.

GRETA : Good-bye. (*They shake hands.*)

[RALPH *shows* MRS. MELVILLE *out and then comes back.*

RALPH : Dear old Auntie Doe. What did you think of her ?

GRETA : She's exactly like a feather bed. I didn't know people still dressed like that. She looks like the drawings of English tourists in French comic papers.

RALPH : She's an old darling. I didn't know how fond of her I was. She's so awfully part of my life. The part you don't know, unfortunately.

GRETA : Well, I don't see why you need drag me into going to dinner with her. That'll be a pretty evening's fun !

RALPH : It's her sixtieth birthday.

GRETA : What a thing to celebrate !

RALPH : I expect you'll want to when you're sixty.

GRETA : I shall be dead when I'm sixty. My God, how awful !

RALPH : It is a bit frightening, isn't it ? What'll we be like ? Darby and Joan ?

GRETA : You'd love that, wouldn't you ? How beautiful !

RALPH : I think it could be fun.

GRETA : I know you do.

RALPH : What have you been doing all day ?

GRETA : Not a damn thing. I didn't get up until lunch time.

RALPH : What time did you get back this morning ? About four ?

GRETA : Half-past seven.

RALPH : My God ! I thought most people were going when I left at two.

GRETA : We went on to Dugsie's and kept it up there. Had breakfast with him, and came straight home to bed.

RALPH : Well, if that's your idea of pleasure . . .

GRETA (*in arms*) : Why not ? Where's the harm in it ?

RALPH : None, I suppose. Only . . .

GRETA : Only you just can't bear me to enjoy myself, can you ?

RALPH : That's not fair.

GRETA : Well, why should I leave a party when it's beginning to get good, just because you were brought up to think that half-past two was late hours ?

RALPH : Of course not.

GRETA : Damn it all, I must have some pleasure in my life.

RALPH : Is dancing to a gramophone at all hours in a smoky studio so terribly amusing ?

GRETA : You used to think so.

RALPH : Did I ? I suppose I'm getting old. (*He goes and sits beside her, and puts his arms round her.*) Darling, don't let's quarrel.

GRETA (*coldly*) : I'm not quarrelling.

RALPH (*laughing*) : Aren't you ? I beg your pardon. I thought you were. What are we doing to-night ?

GRETA : Nothing. Let's go and have dinner out somewhere.

RALPH : For a change ? Why not stay at home ?

GRETA : What for ?

RALPH : I'd like an evening alone with you occasionally. Do I bore you so terribly ?

GRETA : Oh, don't be silly.

RALPH : Well . . .

GRETA : But I like to see life. I like people

around me, and noise and music. I'm used to it. I like to be where things are going on. I hate being cooped up alone here where you know nothing can possibly happen except bedtime.

RALPH : What do you want to happen ?

GRETA : I don't know. Anything.

RALPH : Let's have supper down here, in the studio . . . cook something over the fire. Shall we ?

GRETA : All right. We'll ask Reggie and Edna to come in.

RALPH : Why must there always be other people ? Do you so hate being alone with me ?

GRETA : Oh, for God's sake . . .

RALPH : I wish you loved me a little bit. I'm not asking much, am I ? To spend an evening alone with you now and then. (*Kneeling behind her on the divan and putting his arms round her neck and snuggling his face against her hair.*) Darling, I do love you. But I want a chance to tell you so sometimes, that's all. Darling ! (*He kisses her. She lies back in his arms.*) We've forgotten what it's like to be lovers.

GRETA : We never were lovers. That's the trouble. We've always been husband and wife. We ought to have had an affair the first day we met. We should have been much better off like that. I wanted to, you know.

RALPH : I know. You're awfully proud of that, aren't you ? You're always telling me. Are you by any chance reproaching me because we didn't ?

GRETA : Yes, in a way. It was taking an unfair advantage of me. When I found you didn't want to, that you didn't think of me like that, it made me fall twice as hard in love with you. Damn fool, wasn't I ?

RALPH : I'm glad.



GRETA : I thought you were the nicest thing I'd ever met. The first man who'd ever thought of marrying me, barring fatherly old gentlemen.

RALPH : Did they want to ?

GRETA : When they couldn't get what they wanted any other way. Fatherly, my foot ! What made you so keen on marriage ?

RALPH : I don't know. I just wanted you for always. I'm glad I've got you. (*They kiss.*) Do you remember that first evening at the Cabaret ? I wish that dress wasn't worn out.

GRETA : What ? The silver tissue one ? It was old then.

RALPH : I wish you'd get another like it. Funny, how I cling to old things. . . . Your old frocks ; my old clothes ; bits of home ; bits of my past. You love to shake off the past, don't you ?

GRETA : So would you, if you'd had mine. I ran away from *my* home. I've no love for the boarding-houses and Shaftesbury Avenue flats where I've spent my life. Talking of the past, Isaacs wants me to go back to him. He's opening a new place, " The Mogador."

RALPH : You're not thinking of it ?

GRETA (*lazily*) : Why not ? I think I'd rather like it.

RALPH : Oh, my dear, no.

GRETA : It would be something to do. Give me pocket money. Keep me busy.

RALPH : I'd hate you to.

GRETA : Why ?

RALPH : Oh . . . dancing in cabarets . . .

GRETA : You didn't mind it before. You were rather proud of it.

RALPH : Yes, but it's different now.

GRETA : How conventional you are.

RALPH : Well, you're my wife now, and . . .

GRETA : My God ! You are a prig, sometimes.  
(*She sits up.*)

RALPH : I don't mean to be.

GRETA : No. You can't help it. It's born in you.  
In your family. Look at your sister.

RALPH : What about her ?

GRETA : Was there ever a duller, stuffier example of virtuous married womanhood.

RALPH : My God, that's funny.

GRETA : Why ? Oh, I know. Because they lived in sin before they were married ! How perfectly terrible ! All the same, I must say I can't believe it. She's making up for it now all right.

RALPH : What do you mean ?

GRETA : Was anything ever more dull and respectable than their house ? And the regularity with which she's been having her babies ! Two in two years and another coming now. She's making a positive religion of it.

RALPH : Well, I don't see what harm it does you.

GRETA : None, thank God ! But you needn't expect me to be like that.

RALPH : I don't.

GRETA : Well then, why can't I go back to Isaacs ?

RALPH (*suddenly stubborn and obstinate*) : Because I don't want you to.

GRETA : My lord and master !

RALPH : If you like. But I don't.

GRETA : So, of course, there's no more to be said about it.

RALPH : I hope not.

GRETA (*rising and stretching herself*) : I see.

RALPH : And what does that mean ?

GRETA : My master's word is law. Salaam.  
(*She makes an Eastern bow.*) And all obedience to Allah the all-powerful.

RALPH : Don't be a fool.

GRETA : Who's quarrelling now ?

[*There is a knock at the studio door.*]

RALPH : Who's that ? Someone at the door ?

GRETA : You'd better go and see.

[RALPH opens the door. DUFF is standing outside.]

RALPH : Duff ! How nice to see you. Come in.

DUFF : Can I ? Just for a minute ? Oh, hello, Greta.

GRETA : Hello, stranger.

RALPH : What's your news ?

DUFF : That's what I've just come round to tell you. I've had twins.

GRETA : What ?

DUFF : I said I'd had twins.

GRETA : How very uncomfortable for you.

RALPH : Greta, don't. . . . When, Duff ?

DUFF : A couple of hours ago. Phyl's had a pretty damnable time. As a matter of fact they turned me out of the house at lunch time, and I've been spending the afternoon in the Tate Gallery. I haven't the remotest idea what I saw there. I telephoned home just now.

RALPH : How's Phyl ?

GRETA : All three doing well ?

DUFF : Thank God !

GRETA : Why do people do these things ? Are you awfully fed up ?

DUFF : No. As a matter of fact I'm frightfully pleased.

RALPH : Yes. What kind, Duff ?

DUFF : Boys. Fun, isn't it ? Two of each now.

RALPH : Even numbers for fights in the nursery. What a row they'll all make. No, but seriously, Duff, I'm frightfully glad . . . if you are.

DUFF (*smiling*) : I am.

GRETA (*maliciously*) : And Phyl ?

DUFF : Do you know, I think she'll be quite glad too ? Will you be godfather again, Ralph ?

RALPH : To both ? Can I ? I'd love to. Does that mean two christening mugs ?

DUFF : 'Fraid so. I couldn't possibly let them drink out of the same cup. Well, I must go. I want to get back to Phyl. I thought I'd just come in and let you know.

RALPH : I'm frightfully glad you did.

DUFF : Good-bye, Greta.

GRETA : Good-bye. And my congratulations. I'm afraid I'm rather useless on these occasions, so I won't offer to do anything. (*Shakes hands.*)

RALPH (*as they go to the door*) : Bye, Duff. I do hope Phyl's all right.

DUFF : So do I, my God !

RALPH : Give her my love. Tell her how glad I am. What do I send her ? Grapes ?

DUFF : No, please don't. Your Aunt Beatrice has been much too fructiferous already. I *must* go. Don't forget, I haven't seen them yet.

GRETA : I expect they'll keep.

RALPH : Well . . . congrats. You might telephone me later, just to say how everything is.

DUFF : I will. Cheerio. (*He goes. RALPH comes back.*)

GRETA : Another good man gone wrong. What a pity. Do you know, I like that one. I'd like to have an affair with him.

RALPH : Try.



GRETA : I have tried. It's too late. He's gone all domestic. Besides, he hates me. And he doesn't mind showing it.

RALPH : Well, you weren't being exactly nice to him this afternoon.

GRETA : I'm not interested in twins. What a pretty maudlin scene. I seem to have heard nothing but babies this afternoon. First your aunt, and now Duff. You love it, of course, don't you ?

RALPH : What ?

GRETA : All that kind of thing. I am sorry if I'm a disappointment to you, darling, but I might as well warn you that if you're warming up for an intimate firelight lecture to-night on the beauties of domesticity and maternity you won't find a very sympathetic audience.

RALPH (*angrily*) : I wasn't.

GRETA : That's all right, then. I might also warn you that I don't intend to dine at your aunt's with you.

RALPH : Why not ?

GRETA : Because it would bore me.

RALPH : How do you know ?

GRETA : Because I know exactly what it would be like. All the reminiscences of your home, and your childhood. All the talk about babies, Phyl's . . . and otherwise . . . (*Mimicking MRS. MELVILLE*) " I expect you will when they come " . . . hinting at me that I haven't done my duty as a wife.

RALPH : Have I ever hinted that ?

GRETA : Yes, darling, quite often.

RALPH : I wasn't aware of it.

GRETA : Then that makes it a little worse.

RALPH : Anyway, I don't see what it's got to do with Auntie Doe. I want you to come with me.

GRETA : I wanted you to stay at the party last night.

RALPH : That's a bit different.

GRETA : Is it ?

RALPH : I know it seems a joke to you, but I happen to be fond of Auntie Doe, and she'd like to have us there. Isn't that a little different from sitting around with a fancy crowd of music-hall artistes who don't mean a damned thing to you?

GRETA (*airily*) : I suppose so. (*Turning on him*) Oh, isn't it sweet ! Such a nice boy . . . so good to his relations . . . so fond of his home and his family ! As if they weren't responsible for all that's wrong with you.

RALPH : What do you mean ?

GRETA : This suburban complex of yours. Isn't it that that's made you the self-satisfied prig that you are ? As for your home, a lot of good that did you . . . tied down to your mother's apron strings all those years ! You won't stay at a party like last night's, but you'll expect me to sit around an Earl's Court drawing-room while your family chants the noble name of Thomas ! You can sneer at my friends and say you won't have them around the place. . . . I'm not allowed to have Zoe here. . . .

RALPH (*contemptuously*) : Zoe !

GRETA : Well, why not ? She's been a damned good friend to me in the old days, but she's not respectable ! Just because she turned up tight, poor wretch, and because she left a drunken beast of a husband for a cad who's let her down, you can get up in the pulpit about it ! But your dear old aunt who wants me to have half a dozen babies and go to bed at half-past ten every night, except when we dine with her, or she with us, once a month, that's different, isn't it ? Because she's respectable. Respectable ! Respectability's your god. That's why I can't go back to Isaacs.

RALPH : So that's what it is, is it ?

GRETA : What ?

RALPH : That's what's worrying you. That's the reason for this outburst. Your craving for the old life. I should have thought you'd be glad to be done with it.

GRETA : Would you ? Well, I'm not. You'd have thought I'd be glad to be married to a patronising prig whose idea of what a wife ought to be is his virtuous Tooting mother and Brixton sister. And what about her, anyway ?

RALPH (*livid*) : Shut up !

GRETA : You think you know everything, don't you ? You think you're God Almighty ! You, who've always been wrapped in cotton wool, who've let yourself get so cluttered up with home and family and duty that you haven't the remotest idea what real life's like . . . if you'd had to work for your living since you were seventeen as I did, not know where your next meal's coming from, perhaps you wouldn't be so damned sure of yourself. Cabaret dancer ! Music-hall artistes ! Well, what's wrong with them ? You'll find a damned sight better lot of people, and damned sight better friends in cabarets and music-halls than you will in all your suburban drawing-rooms. (*Slowly*) You ! Why, you're bourgeois to the marrow of your bones.

RALPH : I see.

*[He looks at her. There is sudden hatred in his face. She returns his stare and then turns and walks out of the room. He stands staring after her.]*

CURTAIN

## SCENE II

SCENE : PHYL and DUFF's house near Regent's Park, six months later, about half-past ten in the evening.

PHYL and DUFF and MRS. MELVILLE are sitting around. DUFF wears a dinner jacket, PHYL evening dress, and MRS. MELVILLE a dress of some dark material. Also present are DORIS MELVILLE and her young man, CYRIL GREENWOOD. DORIS is twenty-eight, and a dull, eager young woman. CYRIL GREENWOOD is an earnest, shy young man, with a nervous ingratiating giggle, and wears a not-too-well fitting dinner jacket.

*The room is a very charming Adam's room. There is a slight atmosphere of boredom about, which DUFF and PHYL are making valiant attempts to conceal. DUFF is standing at a side-table dispensing drinks.*

DUFF : Drink, Greenwood ?

CYRIL : Oh, er, thanks. Just a small one.

DUFF : That do you ?

CYRIL : Yes, rather.

DUFF (*pouring in soda*) : Like that ?

CYRIL : Yes, rather. (DUFF hands it to him.)

DUFF (*giving himself a drink*) : And a large one for me.

[DORIS takes a sip from CYRIL's glass.

MRS. MELVILLE : Whisky, Doris ?

DORIS : Just a sip of Cyril's. (*She drinks and pulls a face.*)

DUFF : Well, once again, here's to you and Doris. (*Holds up his glass.*)

CYRIL : Oh, er, thanks.

MRS. MELVILLE : I suppose it's too late for us to hope to see Ralph to-night ?

PHYL : It's only half-past ten. He was so sorry he



couldn't be here for dinner, but he promised he'd look in.

MRS. MELVILLE : And Greta ?

PHYL : I don't know. I expect she's dancing.

DORIS : As late as this ?

PHYL : Oh, yes. She probably doesn't start until midnight. She's at "The Mogador."

DUFF : Alias the Café Isaacs.

DORIS (*to* CYRIL) : We must go and see her one night, Cyril.

CYRIL : Yes, rather.

DORIS : She does dance on Saturdays, I suppose ? We don't go out late during the week.

CYRIL : Late nights are my ruin. I feel like a bit of chewed string the next day.

MRS. MELVILLE : You haven't met Ralph, have you, Cyril ? You'll like him so much. I do hope he comes in this evening. Have you seen him lately, Phyl ?

PHYL : No, I'm afraid I haven't.

MRS. MELVILLE : Now that you're the mother of a family you don't go out much either, I suppose.

PHYL : Not a great deal.

CYRIL (*making conversation*) : Do any of your kiddies go to school ?

PHYL : No. Not yet. Jennifer's not three, you know, and she's the eldest.

DUFF : Phyl performed the extraordinary feat of having four children in less than three years.

CYRIL : Oh, yes ?

DUFF : You needn't bother to do mental arithmetic. The last consignment was twins.

CYRIL : Oh, really.

DORIS : Don't you remember I told you.

CYRIL : Yes, rather !

MRS. MELVILLE : They're such darlings. And Jennifer's so pretty. She's going to be the image of your mother, Phyl.

DUFF : Oh, I hoped she looked like me.

MRS. MELVILLE : I can see Mrs. Thomas written all over her.

DUFF : Like a copy-book ?

MRS. MELVILLE (*laughing*) : You know what I mean ! There's the sweetest photograph of your mother, Phyl, taken when she was just about Jennifer's age.

PHYL : Do you mean that funny one in a tartan dress with a big sash ? I've got it somewhere. There's a sweet one of Uncle Arthur too, in a velvet suit.

MRS. MELVILLE : Oh, have you got that ? I would like to have it so much. You know, he never would be photographed. I wonder if you could spare it ?

PHYL : But of course, auntie. It's in an old album somewhere upstairs. I'll go and see if I can find it.

MRS. MELVILLE : Don't bother now. Any time will do.

PHYL (*rising*) : I think I know where it is. Besides, I just want to go and peep in at the babies.

DORIS : May I come too ? I'd love to see them asleep.

PHYL : Of course. Come along.

[*Exit PHYL and DORIS. A clammy silence falls on the room. DUFF suppresses a yawn.*]

DUFF (*after an awkward pause*) : Do you play golf, Greenwood ?

CYRIL : Er—no.

MRS. MELVILLE : Cyril's very fond of tennis.

DUFF : Oh, yes ?

MRS. MELVILLE : So is Doris. They met at the tennis club, you know.

DUFF : Oh, really ? Have you known each other long ?

CYRIL : Yes. Oh, yes. About five years.

DUFF : Really ?

CYRIL (*desperately*) : Were you and Phyllis . . .  
Oh, if I may call her that. . . .

DUFF : Of course.

CYRIL : Were you engaged long ?

DUFF (*with a smile*) : Yes. About two years.

MRS. MELVILLE : Oh, but . . .

DUFF : What ?

MRS. MELVILLE : I thought . . .

DUFF : Oh ! (*With a laugh*) Did I say two years ?  
I meant two weeks. (*All laugh.*) We did it all in a tearing hurry.

MRS. MELVILLE : And so quietly.

DUFF : Alice was the only person we let in. We had to have her sign the register. Phyl thought she wouldn't be properly married without Alice's sanction.

MRS. MELVILLE : It's nice her still being with you.

DUFF : You mean our still being with her !  
She's a terrible tyrant. She and the children.

[ALICE shows in RALPH. He is wearing tails, and looks very tired and pale.]

RALPH : Am I late for the fun ? Hello, auntie.  
I'm glad you haven't gone. (*Kisses her.*)

MRS. MELVILLE : How are you, dear ? Ralph, this is Cyril.

RALPH (*shaking hands*) : How do you do ? I've been meaning to write and congratulate you, but I've been so rushed. Will you forgive me ?

CYRIL : Yes, rather !

RALPH : Let me do it now. Congratulations.

CYRIL : Oh, thanks.

RALPH : Where's the lady ?

CYRIL : Upstairs with your sister. Oh, here they are.

[*Re-enter PHYLL and DORIS. PHYLL carries a family album.*]

PHYLL : Hello, Ralph. You're all dressed up.

RALPH : Yes. I've got to go on to a party. Hello, Doris. My congratulations.

DORIS : Thanks, Ralph.

MRS. MELVILLE : How are the babies ?

PHYLL : Sleeping peacefully, Heaven be praised.

RALPH : How are Hengist and Horsa ?

CYRIL : Are those their names ?

DUFF : They were going to be. But the clergyman forgot, and christened them Giles and Dennis instead. And then I think he christened the wrong ones ; named Giles Dennis, and Dennis Giles.

RALPH : How did you know ?

DUFF : The one with the Oxford tie-ups was supposed to be Giles, and the one with the Cambridge Dennis. But he got them the other way round.

CYRIL (*quite seriously*) : Would that matter ?

DUFF : Oh, terribly. I don't think they'll ever get over it. They had a special Congress of Archbishops to find out if we couldn't rechristen them. But what's done's done.

RALPH : You could always call Giles Dennis and Dennis Giles.

DUFF : We do.

RALPH : Then how do you know which is which ?



DUFF : A father's heart can tell.

MRS. MELVILLE : Couldn't Greta come with you ?

RALPH : Er—no. She's working. What have you got there, Phyl ?

PHYL : Family portraits.

RALPH : Oh, what fun ! Let me see.

DUFF : I used to have such a sweet one of myself smiling self-consciously on a hearth-rug, and dressed in a wisp.

DORIS : A what ?

DUFF : You know. A tactful bit of chiffon.

PHYL : This is the one you meant, isn't it, auntie ?

RALPH : Is that Uncle Arthur ?

MRS. MELVILLE : Yes. How strange it is, looking at all these. Arthur and your father and mother. . . . It's so sad. They were all quite young.

RALPH : Oh, look at Aunt Beatrice. Did people really wear clothes like that ? Is that mother ?

MRS. MELVILLE : Yes. Pretty, wasn't she ? I remember that frock.

PHYL : Did you know her before she was married ?

MRS. MELVILLE : Oh yes. Arthur and I were engaged a long time, you know, and so were your mother and father. Your grandfather didn't approve, and we used to help each other. Like conspirators.

PHYL : Do tell us.

MRS. MELVILLE : It was all rather romantic. Arthur and I were secretly engaged, and so were your mother and father. We none of us knew for ever so long, and then one day your mother told Arthur, and he told her, and then

she and I met for the first time. How long ago that seems !

PHYL : How exciting ! Mother and father secretly engaged. I never knew. Mother never told me. Why didn't grandpa approve ?

MRS. MELVILLE : Well, he wanted your mother to marry someone else. A client of his . . . quite an old man.

DORIS : What an old beast !

PHYL : And mother wouldn't ?

MRS. MELVILLE : No. She was in love with your father, you see. And then your grandfather sent her away to France for a year to stay with a cousin of his, and your mother and father went on writing all the time. He used to send the letters to me, and I'd post them on to her because of the writing on the envelope.

PHYL (*turning to DUFF*) : Duff !

DUFF : Funny, isn't it ?

PHYL : What was father like ?

MRS. MELVILLE : Darling . . . you knew him.

PHYL : Yes, but then ?

MRS. MELVILLE : He was a dear. And so good . . . so conscientious. He worked so hard . . . to make a position for himself, so that they could get married. They weren't well off at first, you know. He had quite a struggle.

RALPH : Yes. When he died I found account books showing every penny he'd ever spent. . . .

CYRIL : I've tried to do that, but I never can keep it up. I start every first of January but it never gets beyond the second week.

DORIS : Just like me and my diary.

MRS. MELVILLE : Isn't it funny . . . to think of all of us. . . . Your mother as I first remember her . . . and now you married and with children. It was nice Jennifer being born before she died.

What a shame she never saw *you* married, Ralph. She was always so proud of your success.

RALPH (*tonelessly*) : Yes.

MRS. MELVILLE : You were such a good son to her.

RALPH : Auntie, please . . .

DORIS (*to* CYRIL) : She was a darling. Such a wonderful mother. Just like a sister to Ralph and Phyl.

MRS. MELVILLE : We must go. Cyril has to get up so early. (*Rises.*)

DUFF : Working hard . . . to make a position for himself?

CYRIL (*laughing self-consciously*) : Well . . .

DUFF : Even though you don't keep accounts.

MRS. MELVILLE : Good-bye, Phyl. It was nice of you to have us. I've enjoyed my evening. May I take the photograph? Thank you so much. Good-bye, Duff. Good-bye, Ralph.

[*Good-byes are said all round. Kisses, etc. DUFF and PHYL go out with MRS. MELVILLE, DORIS and CYRIL. RALPH is left alone. He goes on looking at the album of photographs. DUFF and PHYL come back.*]

DUFF : Well, that's over !

PHYL : Anything the matter, Ralph?

RALPH : No. Why do I hate it so when Auntie Doe gets sentimental about mother?

PHYL : It is a little embarrassing.

RALPH : And all that about Greta. (*Pause.*) Look here, Phyl. You'd better know. Greta and I are getting a divorce.

PHYL (*after a rapid exchange of glances with DUFF*) : Oh, I'm sorry.

RALPH : It couldn't go on like that. You probably guessed.

PHYL : Is she divorcing you ?

RALPH : No. She's not in a position to.

PHYL : You mean she's gone to someone else ?

RALPH : No, but there's been someone else. More than once.

DUFF : How long have you known ?

RALPH : Oh, ages.

PHYL : You've known she was unfaithful to you ?

RALPH : Yes. I put up with that, though. . . . I'd have put up with more than that.

DUFF : Why ?

RALPH : Because . . . Oh, well, it doesn't matter. It's over now. She couldn't stick it any longer.

PHYL : And you ?

RALPH : God knows.

PHYL (*gently*) : Are you still in love with her ?

RALPH : I don't know. Yes . . . in a way.

PHYL : She's not still living with you ?

RALPH : No. She's been at an hotel this last week. I've been in the house alone.

PHYL : Poor old Ralph ! Why didn't you let us know ?

RALPH : Oh . . . (*He makes a gesture, and then goes on*) I ought never to have married her, I suppose. What a good thing mother never knew. How she'd have hated her.

PHYL : Yes.

RALPH (*turning over leaves of the album*) : It's funny, isn't it ? Me . . . us . . . look at these photos. Mother as a girl. I wonder if she ever thought of . . . us . . . then. Ha !

[*He gives a little nervous embarrassed laugh. He is very much over-strained and not far from tears.*]

PHYL (*coming beside him, putting her arm round him*) :



Ralph . . . don't. (*She finds an old letter in the album.*) I wonder how this got in here? Father's writing. (*Opens it.*) It's to mother. June 26th. I wonder when . . . (*She looks at it.*) It begins "My own Meg."

RALPH : Phyl, don't ! Don't read it !

PHYL : Why ?

RALPH : No, it's prying ! Phyl, don't, please ! Give it to me.

*[He takes the letter, looks at it, then crumples it and throws it in the fire.]*

PHYL : Ralph. . . . Why ?

RALPH : Oh, I don't know, but we couldn't read it. It isn't decent.

PHYL : You never used to feel like that.

RALPH : No. You did, I think.

PHYL : Yes. It was stupid of me.

RALPH : Was it? Would you want . . . your kids . . . to read your letters? Yours and Duff's?

PHYL : After we were dead? Why not?

RALPH : Would you want them to know . . . about . . .

PHYL : Our having lived together? Yes, I mean to tell them.

RALPH : You can't.

PHYL : Why not? Is there anything to be ashamed of in our having loved each other?

RALPH : You couldn't talk to mother and father about it.

PHYL : That's what was so wrong. We didn't know them. We were brought up all wrong. It's not going to be like that with ours.

DUFF : So you say, Phyl.

PHYL : It mustn't be. Their home mustn't be what ours was.

RALPH : What was wrong with it?

PHYL : Have you forgotten ? I want to be friends with my kiddies.

DUFF : Friends ? It'll be their home, just the same.

PHYL : What do you mean ?

DUFF : When Jennifer grows up . . . supposing she meets . . . me ? The counterpart of me, I mean.

PHYL : Well . . . then she needn't be ashamed of it, as I had to be. She'll be able to talk to me. That's why I want to tell her about us.

DUFF : You'll only embarrass her.

PHYL (*thinking*) : I want to bring her up to believe that the loss of what's technically called her virtue doesn't necessarily mean the loss of her self-respect.

DUFF : I wonder ?

PHYL : What ? Whether it does ?

DUFF : No. Whether you can. Whether she'll take it from you.

RALPH : You found out to-night that mother and father were secretly engaged . . .

PHYL : You don't mean you think that they . . .

RALPH : No ! Of course not !

PHYL : That shocks you, doesn't it ? Isn't that wrong ? Though doing what mother did . . . being secretly engaged . . . clandestine letters . . . was probably the equivalent in *her* day of doing what I did in mine.

RALPH : Here !

DUFF : I can't imagine what the next generation's going to do !

PHYL : No, but it was considered wrong. It took courage. She never told *us* about it.

DUFF : You're not going to be so unlike your mother, Phyl.

PHYL : Aren't I ? Oh, I know mother loved us . . . terribly, really. But she was selfish. I mustn't let myself be like that. For instance, if you were to die, Duff, I'd miss you dreadfully, but I wouldn't let myself throw a Mrs. Gummidge as mother did.

RALPH : That's not fair.

PHYL : You hated it, Ralph, as much as I did. More. It was worse for you.

RALPH : Did I ? I suppose I did. But what about you and father ?

PHYL : Father was different.

DUFF : There you are !

PHYL (*recovering*) : Anyway, I know I was sentimental about him. It was wrong . . . all wrong.

DUFF : To be sentimental about one's parents ?

PHYL : To have to be. There mustn't be all that slavery about with our kids . . . the slavery of affection. I don't want them to love me as a duty.

DUFF : Even you, Phyl, won't be able to resist saying "You might at least wait until I'm dead." Every mother's said it once.

PHYL : More than once. It's hitting below the belt.

DUFF : There's no belt in family life. You've got to face it, Phyl. They've got to grow up . . . and we've got to grow old. You might as well make up your mind to it.

PHYL : Why did we *have* children, then ?

DUFF : We wanted them. And, anyway, Phyl, even if you do succeed in turning our kids' home into a sort of . . . Montessori school of confidence . . . I'm not sure you won't be robbing them of something pretty valuable.

PHYL : The Puritan coming out in you, Duff ? Whatever's unpleasant is good for you, eh ? No. Their happiness has got to come first.

DUFF : I know. But you're going to make yourself the judge of that. As their mother you'll think you have the right. Just as I shall, as their father. And that's where the rub's coming.

PHYL : I wonder.

RALPH (*after a pause*) : I must be moving.

PHYL : Where are you going ?

RALPH (*wearily*) : Some bloody party.

PHYL : Why go ? You look fagged out as it is. Why not go home to bed ?

RALPH : I shouldn't be able to sleep.

PHYL : Are you alone in the house ?

RALPH : Yes. It's pretty ghastly. I can't face going back nowadays till it's almost morning, and I'm so tired that . . . I'll sleep anyway.

PHYL : Come and stay here

DUFF : Of course. Why didn't you tell us ?

RALPH : Oh, it's all right.

DUFF : It's not all right. You come here. We've still got a spare room. Come back here to-night. Or rather, don't go to your party, and stay now.

RALPH : May I ? I'd love to. Oh, but my clothes, though.

DUFF : Well, go back and get some things . . . pack a bag. I'll come with you. We'll get a taxi.

RALPH : It's such a bore for you.

DUFF : Rot !

RALPH : Well, it's frightfully good of you. I think I will. I hate the house so terribly now.

DUFF : Of course. I'll go and tell Alice to call a taxi. (*He goes out.*)

PHYL : Poor old Ralph ! I'm glad you're staying.

RALPH : So am I. It's nice here. It's lived in. I suppose it's . . . a home. Greta used to laugh at me about my domestic complex. Funny, considering what you've reminded me of to-night,



how I used to kick against it. All my life my inclinations have led me to an environment where I don't belong. I belong in a place like this. You're happy here?

PHYL : Yes. Except when the kitchen range goes wrong, or the maids make trouble. Alice rules them with a rod of iron.

RALPH (*hardly listening*) : I want a home of my own. Oh, it's fun going to parties, and meeting people, but there's something else. You've got it here with Duff.

PHYL (*gently*) : You'll have it too, when all this is over.

RALPH : Shall I? It's funny . . . now that mother's dead and Greta's gone, there isn't a damned soul left who's got a single claim on me. And I miss it . . . like hell! Silly, isn't it, considering? I want children too. I suppose I shall lecture them about using the place as an hotel . . . for bed and breakfast . . . and *they'll* want to get away. And then be sorry . . . as I am. Oh, well . . . after all . . . I suppose we all come to it . . . to want it, anyway.

PHYL : Yes. (*She grips his hand. He smiles at her.*)

[*Re-enter DUFF.*]

DUFF : Taxi's on its way.

RALPH : I'll get my things.

PHYL : I'll go and see to the room. I'll probably be in bed when you get back.

RALPH : Yes. Don't wait up . . . for me. Good-night, Phyl. Bless you. . . . (*He kisses her and goes out.*)

DUFF (*turning to PHYL, gives her a domestic good-night kiss*) : Good-night, darling. Shan't be long. Don't go to sleep.

PHYL : All right. Don't make a noise when you come in.

[*DUFF goes out. PHYL straightens one or two*

*things, takes up a book, switches out the lights, and goes into the hall. She is heard calling.*

PHYL (*off*) : Oh, Duff, got your key, darling ?

DUFF (*off*) : Just remembered it.

PHYL (*off*) : Oh, right. See you lock up safely. So long, Ralph. Good-night.

RALPH (*off*) : Good-night, Phyl.

*[The door slams and the curtain slowly descends on the darkened, empty stage.]*

CURTAIN

# LONDON WALL

814.36

ES3EQ2

Emerson:

Enayo

acc 7136.

~~VI~~ L 567  
17<sup>10</sup><sub>12</sub> 950F

8<sup>11</sup>/67 31B67  
42A72 31<sup>4</sup>/7

18<sup>9</sup>/54 1163

28.11.55 1427

21<sup>14</sup>/55 1096

22<sup>8</sup>/58 1361

7<sup>4</sup>/57 1550

3.5.57 1174F

21<sup>10</sup>/55 1271366

20<sup>10</sup>/66 1271366



John van Druten  
LONDON WALL

*A Comedy*  
*in Three Acts*

Applications to perform this play must be addressed to the author's agent, A. D. Peters, 4 & 5 Adam Street, Adelphi, London, W.C.2. No performance can take place unless a licence has been obtained.

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To  
J. E. F. DELL

*London Wall* was first presented by Mr. Frank Gregory at the Duke of York's Theatre on Friday, May 1st, with the following cast :

Birkinshaw	HENRY MILLS
Mr. Brewer	HENRY MOLLISON
Miss Hooper	NADINE MARCH
Miss Janus	MARIE NEY
Miss Milligan	HEATHER ANGEL
Miss Willesden	KATIE JOHNSON
Hec. Hammond	FRANK LAWTON
Miss Bufton	HELEN GOSS
Mr. Walker	FRANK ROYDE

Produced by AURIOL LEE



## CHARACTERS *(in order of appearance)*

BIRKINSHAW  
MR. BREWER  
MISS HOOPER  
MISS JANUS  
MISS MILLIGAN  
MISS WILLESSEN  
HEC. HAMMOND  
MISS BUFTON  
MR. WALKER

## SCENES

### ACT I

General office of Messrs. Walker, Windermere & Co., solicitors, in London Wall. Lunch-time.

### ACT II

#### *Scene 1 :*

Mr. Walker's room in the office. 3 o'clock.  
Three weeks later.

#### *Scene 2 :*

The general office. Quarter to six. Same day.

### ACT III

#### *Scene 1 :*

Mr. Walker's room. 9.30 next morning.

#### *Scene 2 :*

The general office. 3 o'clock. Same afternoon.

814.36

ES3E92

Emerson:

Enayo

acc 7136.

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17<sup>10</sup> 2 950F

18<sup>9</sup>/54 1163

28.11.55 1427

21<sup>12</sup>/55 1096

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7<sup>4</sup>/57 1550

3.5.57 1174F

21<sup>10</sup>/54 1221366

26<sup>10</sup>/66 1221366

8<sup>1</sup>/67 31367

49A72 31<sup>4</sup>/72

## ACT I

*The general office of Messrs. Walker, Windermere & Co., solicitors, in London Wall.*

*Lunch-time. About 1.40 in the afternoon.*

*There are two doors to the office. One, down stage R., leads to the corridor and the remainder of the office. Another, down stage L., leads to the typists' room; when it is open the sound of typing can be heard.*

*R. and L. from point of view of the actors.*

*Practically the entire centre of the stage is taken up with an enormous table. Chairs either end of it, and above and below it. Telephone and switchboard and telephonist's chair just above door in R. wall. The whole back wall is occupied by cupboards with sliding-panel doors, half the height of the wall; the top of them forms a long shelf on which are directories, press-copier, files, etc., etc. The shelf can also be sat on. High on the back wall a real shelf, holding letter-books, etc. A stationery-cabinet just above door L. against wall.*

*The table is covered with papers, plans, etc., but must have clear space on it for work. There are no windows on stage except possibly a skylight. The office may well have a sloping roof.*

*When the curtain rises, BIRKINSHAW, a cheeky, grubby, Cockney office boy of about 16 is sitting L. of the table, indexing a letter-book. Behind him on a peg are his hat, coat and very dirty white muffler.*

*BIRKINSHAW (singing) :*

Can a mother's tender care  
Cease towards the child she bear?  
Yes, she may forgetful be  
And bung it through the window  
And bung it through the window  
And bung it through . . .

*[The telephone rings. He goes and answers it.]*  
Hullo! Hullo! Walker, Windermere. Who's

speaking? No, sir, 'e's out at lunch. I couldn't say, sir. No, 'e's out, too, sir. Our Mr. Brewer's in.—Our manager, sir. Oh, very good, sir. I'll tell 'im.

*[Rings off. Scribbles name on a sheet of paper.]*

ERIC BREWER comes in R. He is the managing clerk; a young solicitor of about 30, attractive, slightly gross and on the flashy side; very sure of himself, always cheery and a little familiar. He wears a lounge suit and carries some papers. He watches BIRKINSHAW writing.

BREWER (*good-naturedly*): What's that?

BIRKINSHAW: Mr. Carpenter, sir. 'Phoned for Mr. Walker.

BREWER: Any message?

BIRKINSHAW (*brightly*): No, sir. Just 'phoned.

BREWER (*taking paper from him, looking at it, and then pointing to number of small strips of memo. paper hanging by a piece of pink tape on a nail just below 'phone*): And what are those for, Birkinshaw?

BIRKINSHAW: What, sir?

BREWER: Those slips of paper?

*[BIRKINSHAW grins.]*

Wasting good office stationery like that!

BIRKINSHAW: Sorry, my lord. I was drunk at the time.

BREWER (*laughs*): Where's everybody?

BIRKINSHAW: Gone to lunch.

BREWER: All of them?

BIRKINSHAW: Well, most of 'em.

BREWER: Miss Hooper out?

BIRKINSHAW: Just going, I think. Just bin up to wash.

*[BREWER goes over to door L. and opens it.]*

BREWER: Miss Hooper.



[Enter MISS HOOPER from typists' room. She is about 27, not unattractive, a little truculent. She wears her hat, carries her bag, and is obviously just going out.]

MISS HOOPER : Yes, Mr. Brewer ?

BREWER : Is that letter for Darracks done yet ?

MISS HOOPER (*slightly in arms*) : Not yet. I haven't had a minute all the morning.

BREWER : Well, I want it to go round by hand.

[*Silence.*]

Are you going to lunch now ?

MISS HOOPER (*stonily*) : I was.

BREWER : Well, can you just run it off before you go ?

MISS HOOPER : Run it off ? Two pages, wasn't it ? Is there any hurry ?

BREWER : There is rather. I want them to get it before the Bank closes.

MISS HOOPER : I'm late as it is.

BREWER : Is there anyone else who can read your shorthand ? Who's in there ?

MISS HOOPER : No one (*With a very bad grace*) Oh, all right, I'll do it.

[*She goes back L. and slams the door.*]

BIRKINSHAW (*grimacing*) : 'Ark at Irma ! Ray of sunshine, she is !

BREWER (*to BIRKINSHAW*) : When it's done, bring it to me to sign and I want you to take it round with some deeds. They're in my safe. Better come up and get them.

BIRKINSHAW : Who'll look after the office while I'm out ? Mr. Walker doesn't like me leaving it alone.

BREWER : There's someone in, isn't there ?

[Enter MISS JANUS, R. She is about 35, neither attractive nor particularly plain. She is rather tidy, wearing blouse and skirt, possibly even collar and tie, with a sort of brusque cheery sulkiness about her.

BREWER : Hullo, my fair one. Have you been or are you going ?

MISS JANUS : Where ?

BREWER : Lunch.

MISS JANUS : Been. (To BIRKINSHAW) Who's in ?

BIRKINSHAW : No one.

MISS JANUS : Mr. Windermere's room empty ?

BIRKINSHAW : Far as I know.

[MISS JANUS puts down one of the plugs on the telephone board and goes out.

BREWER : Private call. Ha !

BIRKINSHAW : 'Er boy friend.

BREWER (with a laugh) : Miss Janus ?

BIRKINSHAW : Yes. Blanche—Blanche . . . can you beat it ?

BREWER : Got a boy friend ?

BIRKINSHAW : Not 'arf she 'asn't. Boy friend my left kidney !

BREWER : What do you mean ?

BIRKINSHAW : Why, 'e's as bald as a coot.

BREWER : How do you know ?

BIRKINSHAW : Seen 'im ! Fifty if 'e's a day. Foreign, too. Got some job at the Netherlands Legation . . . Swiss, or something. My word, what these women won't do for something in trousers ! I'd be downright ashamed to keep after a chap the way she does, if I was a girl. And don't 'e 'arf wriggle ! Coo-blow !

BREWER : Wriggle

BIRKINSHAW : Keeps putting 'er off . . . and putting 'er on. Can't see 'er this week. Try and see 'er some time next.

BREWER : How do *you* know ?

BIRKINSHAW : Isn't the telephone my department ? (*Takes up the receiver and listens, then offers it to BREWER.*) Here, listen. She's just got through.

BREWER : Put that down, you little swine !

BIRKINSHAW : 'Ere, 'oo are you calling a swine ?

BREWER : You. Put it down, I say.

BIRKINSHAW (*doing so*) : It's all right. He's engaged, anyway.

BREWER : Do you always listen-in ?

BIRKINSHAW (*irrepressively*) : When I'm not too busy !

BREWER (*amused, in spite of himself*) : You know, you've got no right to talk to me like that. Do you listen-in to me, too ?

BIRKINSHAW : Sometimes.

[MISS JANUS *returns*.

MISS JANUS : Birkinshaw, did you get those biscuits ?

BIRKINSHAW : There now, miss, I forgot. I'm going out in a minute for Mr. Brewer here. I'll get 'em then.

MISS JANUS : Well, don't be long. I want tea early to-day. I've got a splitting headache.

BREWER (*to BIRKINSHAW*) : Get Garibaldis this time.

BIRKINSHAW : Squashed flies ? Right you are, sir.

MISS JANUS : Better get some Petit Beurre for Mr. Walker.

BIRKINSHAW : What about a few ginger-nuts, miss ? Just for a change ?

MISS JANUS : The firm's teeth aren't up to it.

[MISS HOOPER comes in with letter in her hand.  
MISS JANUS goes through to typists' room.]

MISS HOOPER : There you are. (*She gives letter ungraciously to BREWER.*)

BREWER : Thanks. I'm sorry if it's made you late.

MISS HOOPER : It's all right. I adore indigestion. You'd better look at it to see if it's all right.

BREWER (*mockingly*) : Oh, if *you've* typed it, I'm sure it is.

MISS HOOPER : Aren't you sweet ?

[BREWER reads the letter. MISS HOOPER stands patiently by.]

BIRKINSHAW (*at door L.*) : Oh, miss ! Can I 'ave the money for the biscuits. Mr. Valpy's gone to lunch. Cash-box is locked up.

MISS JANUS (*off*) : Here. No, wait a minute. I haven't got any change. (*Comes to door.*) I say, Irma, have you got half-a-crown in your bag ?

[MISS HOOPER looks.]

BREWER (*looking up*) : By the way, Miss Hooper, your initials (*tapping letter*) being R. H., am I right in assuming that Irma is a nom-de-guerre ?

MISS HOOPER (*handing coin to BIRKINSHAW*) : Here. Don't forget to give it back.

BREWER (*continuing*) : You know, somehow you don't look like an Irma to me.

MISS HOOPER (*hand on hip*) : No ?

BREWER (*dreamily*) : No, I see Irma as something dark and sinuous, with flashing eyes, (*dramatically*) and secret papers tucked inside the bosom of her dress.

MISS HOOPER (*insistently*) : Look here, is that letter all right, and can I go to lunch ?



BREWER : Of course. I'm so sorry. Thank you so much.

MISS HOOPER (*ironically*) : Don't mention it.

[*She makes to go.*]

MISS JANUS *starts getting paper out of stationery cupboard.*

BREWER (*stopping* MISS HOOPER) : Oh, just one thing more, Miss Hooper. *Would* you have any objection to telling me what the R. stands for that you spurned in favour of Irma ?

MISS HOOPER (*in ultra-purist accent, rolling the " R " and standing like a mannequin*) : Rose ! Now are you surprised ?

BREWER : No. Quite. I see.

BIRKINSHAW : No rose in all the world  
Until you came !

BREWER : Shut up, you. Here, come with me and get those deeds.

[BIRKINSHAW *follows* BREWER *out* R.]

MISS JANUS : Sweet, isn't he ?

MISS HOOPER : Who ? Our Eric ? Oh, he's not so bad. At least he's friendly.

MISS JANUS : A damn sight too friendly. Where the hell's that brief paper gone to ?

[PAT MILLIGAN *comes in* R. *She is 19, very pretty, simple, a little timid, rather shy and very natural.*]

PAT : Hullo !

MISS JANUS (*friendly*) : Hullo, Pat.

PAT : Everyone out ?

MISS JANUS : Yes. Our lord and master's got an appointment up West till 3.30. I looked in his diary.

PAT (*to* MISS HOOPER) : Have you been out yet ?

MISS HOOPER : Just going.

PAT : You're late, aren't you ?

[Goes into inner room.

MISS HOOPER (to MISS JANUS, *continuing*) : I know you hate Brewer. I think you're a fool to show it as you do, though.

MISS JANUS (*American*) : Oh, yeah ?

MISS HOOPER : After all, he doesn't do you any harm.

MISS JANUS (*as before*) : He certainly does not.

MISS HOOPER : Well, then . . .

MISS JANUS : But it doesn't seem to me a bad thing if one woman does show she doesn't find him irresistible.

[PAT comes out carrying a towel rolled up. She smiles at the others.

PAT : Just going up to wash.

[Exit R.

MISS HOOPER : What do you mean ?

MISS JANUS : Well, he rather fancies himself as a bit of a Casanova, doesn't he ? He's always trying to tell me about his love-life.

MISS HOOPER : Yes, me too.

MISS JANUS : Well, I can withstand it. But I'm worried about *her*. (*Jerks thumb at door R.*)

MISS HOOPER : Who ? Pat ?

MISS JANUS : And I've seen him watching her with that nasty, leering "how much for this little lot" look of his. . . . You know he can't keep his hands off anything that looks like a "prillil girl." One of these days I'm going to give Eric-or-little-by-little a piece of my mind.

MISS HOOPER : Surely Pat, can look after herself. You've gone soppy about that child ever since she came here. I don't know what you see in her. And anyway, she's got her own boy. That chap downstairs . . . what's his name . . . Hec. Hammond.

*Shamus - 12  
m.*

MISS JANUS : I know. But they're babies, both of them. Besides, Hec. gets about tuppence a week and puts it in his money-box. Brewer doesn't.

MISS HOOPER : Well, what are you afraid of, anyway? Not of Pat turning up here with a whimpering bundle one morning, and hiding it in the typewriter cover? Saying that she found it under the gooseberry bushes . . .

MISS JANUS : No, of course not. But I like the kid. She's much too young to be let out on her own like this . . . and she's got no one to look after her.

MISS HOOPER : Aren't you the little Wendy? What's the boy like?

MISS JANUS : Nice . . . straight, anyway.

MISS HOOPER : Well, short of getting them married I don't see what you're going to do about it.

MISS JANUS : That's just what I'd like to do.

MISS HOOPER : Well, they've only known each other since she came here, haven't they? That's not more than six weeks.

MISS JANUS : Yes, and before they know where they are it'll be six years, and Pat'll be going on for thirty and still here. Being a shorthand typist at three quid a week for the rest of her life. I know.

MISS HOOPER : Cheerful, aren't you?

MISS JANUS : Well, it's true, isn't it?

MISS HOOPER : She's got lots of time.

MISS JANUS : Yes. I've been saying that for ten years. You've been saying it for seven. And where the hell has it got us? What's going to happen to me if I don't pull it off with (*jerk*ing thumb at telephone) what's-is-name . . . or you with Douglas? (*In a sympathetic, confidential tone*) How *are* things, Irma?

MISS HOOPER : Bloody.

MISS JANUS : Won't she divorce him ?

MISS HOOPER : He says not. Did you talk to *him* to-day ?

MISS JANUS : No. He was busy.

MISS HOOPER : You're not really in love with him, are you, Blanche ?

MISS JANUS : That's my business.

MISS HOOPER : Oh, sorry I spoke. Here, I must go to lunch after all the fuss I made about it. Can I borrow your library book ?

MISS JANUS : Yes. You might change it for me. I forgot.

MISS HOOPER (*going into inner room for book*) : What shall I get ?

MISS JANUS (*pronouncing her "s"'es like Welsh double "l"'s*) : Something lascivious. And you might bring me in some aspirin, too.

MISS HOOPER (*reappearing*) : Right you are. So long.

[*She goes out R., passing BREWER and BIRKINSHAW who re-enter. BIRKINSHAW carries a parcel of deeds. MISS JANUS returns to inner room.*]

BREWER : Now, you understand. Take them straight round, and don't come back without a receipt. Get along now. By the way, who was that chap we passed on the stairs ? Do you know ?

BIRKINSHAW : Yes, he belongs down below, Parkers, the shipping people.

BREWER : I've seen him hanging about *here*, haven't I ?

BIRKINSHAW : Shouldn't wonder.

BREWER : What's he want ?

BIRKINSHAW : Miss Milligan.



BREWER : What do you mean ?

BIRKINSHAW : What I say. He's 'er boy-friend. Always coming up here and wanting to borrow the Directory or the Law List or something. (*He gets his hat, coat and scarf.*) I say——

BREWER : What ?

BIRKINSHAW : This divorce case—Maverick *versus* Maverick——

BREWER : What about it ?

BIRKINSHAW : Pretty spicy, isn't it ? I suppose I couldn't have a look at the letters ?

BREWER : What letters ?

BIRKINSHAW : Well, there *are* letters, aren't there ? Letters from the co-respondent. Mr. Walker won't give 'em to the young ladies to copy. Valpy and Willis do 'em after hours. I'll type some for you, if you like.

BREWER : You've got your own work to do. Dirty-minded little beast.

BIRKINSHAW : Dirty-minded, I like that ! Well, a chap wants a bit of a change from leases and mortgages and landlord's property tax. Ten blooming months have I been here, and not one juicy case 'ave I seen yet. Might as well work for an undertaker. But Willis said these was hot stuff. Something about wanting to kiss 'er all over, wasn't there ?

BREWER : Get out. Get along with that letter.

BIRKINSHAW : Oh, all right.

[*He goes out R.*]

PAT *returns.*

BREWER : Oh, Miss Milligan, you're back ? I wonder if you'd mind looking after the office while Birkinshaw's out . . . Answer the telephone . . . see anyone who comes in ?

PAT : Of course, Mr. Brewer.

BREWER : Thanks.

[MISS WILLESSEN *appears at door R. She is a fantastic and rather tragic figure—about 65—dressed considerably below her years, with a lot of bits and pieces about her, including chiffon trailing from her hat. Her manner is timid and shrinking.*

MISS WILLESSEN : Oh . . . excuse me . . . but is Mr. Walker in ?

BREWER (*turning*) : Oh, good afternoon, Miss Willesden. No, I'm afraid he's not.

MISS WILLESSEN : Oh dear . . . will he be back soon ?

BREWER : I . . . I really don't know, Miss Willesden.

PAT (*shy*) : Not till 3.30, Miss Janus said, Mr. Brewer.

MISS WILLESSEN : Oh . . . oh . . . do you think he'd be able to see me then if I were to wait ?

BREWER : Not without an appointment, I'm afraid.

MISS WILLESSEN : Oh . . . oh, how very trying. Don't you think perhaps . . . you see, I came up from Brighton specially to see him . . .

BREWER : Is there anything *I* can do for you ? I saw you last time, you may remember . . . about your will.

MISS WILLESSEN : Yes . . . yes . . . but it was Mr. Walker I wanted to see to-day. You see, I want to start an action and I wanted to explain everything to him. I've got all the papers here.

[MISS JANUS *comes out of inner room and starts looking up address in directory at back. PAT moves to door, listening with a sort of frightened interest.*

MISS WILLESSEN (*to Miss JANUS*) : Good afternoon.

MISS JANUS : Good afternoon.

BREWER : I could take your instructions, Miss Willesden. I'm afraid Mr. Walker won't be able to see you this afternoon.

MISS WILLESDEN : Oh dear . . . oh dear . . . No, I think I must see him personally. I must come up again, that's all.

BREWER : I'm sorry.

MISS WILLESDEN : Yes . . . yes . . . it was you who saw to my will, wasn't it? Though of course Mr. Walker supervised the actual drawing-up, didn't he? Yes . . . well . . . as a matter of fact, I do want to make a change in that, too. Perhaps I could talk to you about it, and you could tell Mr. Walker.

BREWER : Certainly.

MISS WILLESDEN : Yes, well, I think I'll do that. Perhaps I could write to him about the action and then he could make an appointment to see me, personally.

BREWER : Perhaps that would be best. If you don't mind coming up to my room, I've got your will in my safe.

MISS WILLESDEN : Oh, thank you.

BREWER : This way.

MISS WILLESDEN : Thank you. (*To Miss JANUS*) Good afternoon.

MISS JANUS : Good afternoon.

MISS WILLESDEN (*to PAT*) : Good afternoon.

PAT (*scared*) : Good afternoon.

[*Exit BREWER and Miss WILLESDEN, R. BREWER grimaces with raised eyebrows at Miss JANUS before he goes.*]

Who is that? What's the matter with her?

MISS JANUS : Haven't you ever seen her before? She's cracked.

PAT : Mad, do you mean? Is she a client?

MISS JANUS : Yes, Walker won't see her any more though, she's such a nuisance. Harmless, of course, but definitely cracked. Always starting actions. Always altering her will and adopting people.

PAT : Is she very poor ?

MISS JANUS : Rolling ! That's why the firm puts up with her.

PAT : Poor old thing.

MISS JANUS : You'll probably see quite a lot of her. She's always in and out of here . . . worrying to see our lord and master.

PAT : Does she win her actions ?

MISS JANUS : Of course not.

PAT : I think it's tragic.

MISS JANUS : It is, rather.

*[PAT goes inside inner room, taking towel with her, and returns with a document. She sits at the table and begins to rule it up in red ink.]*

PAT : Saw you at lunch. You don't usually come to Lyons.

MISS JANUS : No, but I couldn't be bothered to walk to-day. I've got a headache.

PAT (*sympathetically*) : Oh, I'm sorry. Let's have tea early. I'll make it.

MISS JANUS : Thanks. I've told the <sup>*boy should do*</sup> ~~job~~ to get the biscuits. Do you and Hec. lunch together every day ?

PAT : When I get off sharp at one we do. That works out at about once a fortnight here. They go strict to time in their office. I wish we did. Miss Hooper was late to-day.

MISS JANUS : Yes, Brewer kept her. By the way, what do you think of that young man ?

PAT : Mr. Brewer ? He's rather nice. I think he's good-looking.

MISS JANUS : My God !



PAT : Don't you ?

MISS JANUS : If you like that sort of thing . . . it's the sort of thing you would like.

PAT : What's the matter with him ?

MISS JANUS : Well, he's the kind that hangs round pillar-boxes on the chance of a housemaid coming out to post a letter, and he's got an idea he's God's gift to women. You watch your step.

PAT : Me ?

MISS JANUS : Yes, you. Don't you let him start anything. Stick to the boy you've got.

PAT : What do you mean ?

MISS JANUS (*coming down*) : How serious are you and Hec. ?

PAT : Serious ? We're friends.

MISS JANUS (*with a world of meaning*) : Oh !

PAT : Do you think that a man and woman can't go about together without . . .

MISS JANUS : Without what ?

PAT : Well . . . without being in love with each other ?

MISS JANUS : I wouldn't put it as high as that. Look here, you're more than friends with Hec.

PAT : I'm not.

MISS JANUS : Well then, it's his fault.

PAT : He doesn't think of me like that.

MISS JANUS : More fool him, then.

PAT : He's only twenty.

MISS JANUS : I've known 'em begin before that.

PAT : He's not interested in girls . . . that way.

MISS JANUS : What is he interested in ?

PAT : Himself. His career. He's not always going to be with Parkers downstairs, a clerk in a shipping office.

MISS JANUS : What is he going to do ?

PAT : Big things.

MISS JANUS : What ?

PAT : Well, I don't know exactly what, but . . . well, he writes. You know, I've been typing his stories. He's learning French, and when he's done that he's going to learn Spanish, so that he can get a job abroad if one offers. He wants to travel.

MISS JANUS : And are you going to like that ?

PAT : I can't stand in his way. Besides, it won't be for ages, yet. He's only been doing French a year. But he's awfully good at it. He's reading *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* now. You remember, that Lon Chaney picture. It's a book. Ever so long, too. That's good in a year, you know.

MISS JANUS : You *are* keen on him ?

PAT (*awkwardly*) : Yes, I . . . I suppose so . . . in a way.

MISS JANUS : Then get him. Get him while he's young, and *you're* young. God knows it's hard enough to get men up to the scratch later on.

PAT : How can you talk like that ?

MISS JANUS : Well, you want him.

PAT : I don't ! I don't want anyone. I think it's beastly !

MISS JANUS : You'll think it a damn sight beastlier if you're still sitting on that typing-cushion of yours in ten years' time, and he's out with the gay Señoritas in South America or somewhere.

PAT : Well, anyway, even if I were in love with him . . . I wouldn't want him unless *he* was keen.

MISS JANUS : Look here, child. It strikes me you're wasting your time. Of course I know he's

young . . . but a man who's got as much ambition as that isn't any good to a girl. Of course, if you're really keen on him it's no use my talking. Have you met his people?

PAT : No. He says if he started to bring a girl home, they'd probably think things.

MISS JANUS : What things?

PAT : Well, he's got a lot of brothers and sisters, and they tease him.

MISS JANUS : Do you take him to your place?

PAT : No, I can't. You see, it's only a bed-sitting room, and Mrs. Middleton won't let us have men up. Oh, she's right, of course.

MISS JANUS : Where *do* you see him, then?

PAT : Well, he sees me home sometimes, and we go for walks Saturdays . . . have tea at the Express Dairy . . . only it runs into money.

MISS JANUS : You know, you need someone to take your affairs in hand.

PAT (*hurt*) : I can look after myself, thanks. (*Rising*) Where's the green silk?

MISS JANUS : In the men's room, I think. Willis borrowed it.

[PAT goes out R.]

MISS JANUS *copies down address, and begins to return to room L. Enter BREWER.*

BREWER : Well, I got rid of her.

MISS JANUS (*coldly*) : Oh.

BREWER : She said what a nice girl you were. And she was very impressed with Pat Milligan. Said how pretty she was.

MISS JANUS (*as before*) : Oh, yes? (*Jerking her thumb at typing door*) You know, she's not in there. She can't hear you.

BREWER : Miss Janus, why do you dislike me so?

MISS JANUS : I don't know what you mean.

BREWER : Oh, I know you've been a faithful and trusted servant of the firm for . . . ten years, is it . . . and I'm only a novice, but still . . .

MISS JANUS : What are you talking about ?

BREWER : But, after all, we're rather a happy family . . .

MISS JANUS : Yes ? Well, I'm the changeling.  
(*She opens the door of the typists' room.*)

BREWER : Oh, Miss Janus.

MISS JANUS : What is it now ?

BREWER : Are you aware that Birkinshaw is in the habit of listening-in to your private telephone calls ?

MISS JANUS : Snotty-nosed little beast. Yes, I know.

BREWER : I thought I'd tell you. After all, we all have our private lives.

MISS JANUS (*suspiciously*) : Has Birkinshaw been talking ? What did he say ?

BREWER : Nothing. He merely indicated that you . . . *had* a private life, that the cold, efficient secretary manner which is all that I have ever been privileged to see was perhaps only a mask behind which there lay hidden the warm, beating heart . . . (*dramatically*) of a woman !

MISS JANUS (*insistently*) : What did he say ?

BREWER : Nothing.

MISS JANUS : Come on.

BREWER : No, really. I was only ragging. Just my fun. I must have my little joke.

MISS JANUS : You know, you ought to be one of those men who spend their time leaning across



bar-counters in the shape of a letter S, getting fresh with the barmaid !

[*She goes out angrily L.*

PAT comes in R. as she does so.

BREWER (*turning to PAT*) : I think I've got a flea in my ear.

PAT (*surprised*) : What ? Oh, Miss Janus ? Oh, it's all right. She's got a headache. (*She sits at the table and begins to sew up the document with the green silk.*)

[BREWER watches her appreciatively for a moment.

BREWER : What did you think of Miss Willesden ?

PAT : She frightened me, rather. Miss Janus says she's mad.

BREWER : Miss Janus is right.

PAT : Have you ever read *Bleak House* ? She reminds me of the mad woman in that . . . the one who was always waiting about the Law Courts. Miss Flite.

BREWER : Yes. There's one like her in every lawyer's office.

PAT (*shuddering*) : Is there ? How awful.

BREWER : What have you got there ?

PAT : This ? It's the Huddleston mortgage. (*Pause.*) What's a message ?

BREWER : A message ? A house.

PAT : Oh !

BREWER : What did you think it was ? Something to eat ? Like the man in the Bible who sold his birthright for a pot of message ? (*Pat laughs.*) How do you like working here ?

PAT : Oh, all right, I think. I wish I understood what it was all about more.

BREWER : What don't you understand ?

PAT : All the names of things. Messuages and . . . garnishees. Writs of . . . Fi Fa.

BREWER : Well, you know what those are ?

PAT : No. What ?

BREWER : Things you put the bailiffs in with.

PAT : Do you mean the brokers ? (*He nods.*) Really ? Do you mean to say that thing I typed yesterday . . . that that's what it was for ?

BREWER : Yes.

PAT : Good Lord. It was all Greek to me. *Who* put the bailiffs in ?

BREWER : Our people.

PAT : Samuelsons ? On that woman in Kensington ? What for ?

BREWER : Underclothes. A hundred and twenty-five pounds.

PAT : Oh, I wish I'd known.

BREWER : Why ?

PAT : Well, it would have made it so much more interesting. Did you say a hundred and twenty-five pounds for underclothes ?

BREWER : Yes, mostly. I think there were six pairs of pyjamas.

PAT : *Can* you spend a hundred and twenty-five pounds on underclothes ?

BREWER : *She* did.

PAT : Was she getting married or something ?

BREWER : I don't think so.

PAT : Golly ! Have you seen her ?

BREWER : No. We don't usually meet the defendant. In this case, I must say I'm sorry.

PAT : Why ?

BREWER (*smiling*) : Well . . . (*PAT doesn't understand.*) I imagine she must be rather attractive.

PAT : I can't think what her dressmaker's bill

must be. It's interesting when you know what it's all about.

BREWER : Want to become a lawyer yourself now ?

PAT (*smiling*) : Is it awfully difficult ?

BREWER (*ditto*) : Awfully.

PAT : Exams ?

BREWER : Um.

PAT : Hard ?

BREWER : Frightful.

PAT : Did *you* have to ?

BREWER (*seriously*) : Yes.

PAT : When ?

BREWER : About a year ago.

PAT : And then you came here ?

BREWER : Yes. And then the firm's business increased so astonishingly that they had to engage a new typist . . . you !

PAT (*laughing*) : Fancy that !

BREWER : Is this your first job ?

PAT : Yes.

BREWER : How old are you ?

PAT : Nineteen. Why ?

BREWER : It's criminal !

PAT : What is ?

BREWER : That you should have to work in an office.

PAT : Why ?

BREWER : You're much too pretty.

PAT : Don't say things like that.

BREWER : Why not ?

PAT : Because they're silly.

BREWER : They're not a bit silly. They're true.

[PAT goes on working.]

(*Suddenly*) What would you do if I were to kiss you ?

PAT (*equally so*) : Swoon !

BREWER : What ?

PAT : Swoon. Fall to the floor in a faint. (*In mock Shakespearean accents*) Lo, the maiden has swooned !

BREWER : I don't think I'll risk it. Have you ever been kissed ?

PAT : Mr. Brewer, don't . . . please.

BREWER : Of course you have.

[*She rises uncomfortably to get scissors from the side. HEC. HAMMOND comes in R. He is a youth of 20, good-looking, a little plebeian. He comes in now with his eyes on PAT and does not at first notice BREWER.*

(*After a minute*) Yes ?

HEC. (*with a start*) : Oh. . . .

BREWER : Do you want anything . . . or anybody ?

HEC. : No, it's all right. I just wondered . . . could I borrow your Law List for a moment ?

BREWER : To take away, do you mean ?

HEC. (*hastily*) : No . . . oh, no . . . no . . . just to look something up in.

BREWER : It's over there.

HEC. : Yes, thanks. (*He goes to the back.*)

[*PAT takes no notice of him but returns to the table and her work. BREWER watches the pair of them amusedly.*

BREWER : Can I help you find what you want ?

HEC. : No, it's all right, thanks.

BREWER : Are your firm looking for a good solicitor ?



HEC. : What ? Oh, no . . . no, it's not that. Just an address.

BREWER (*very seriously*) : Oh, I see.

[*Nods and returns to PAT, playing the following scene at HEC., who listens and watches covertly and with annoyance.*]

Whereabouts do you live, Miss Milligan ?

PAT : Me ? Stamford Hill.

BREWER : With your people ?

PAT : No, with another girl. Rooms. A room, rather.

BREWER : What do you do in the evenings ?

PAT : Oh, I don't know. Read. Go to the pictures, sometimes.

BREWER : Are you fond of them ?

PAT : I'd rather see a good play.

BREWER : Do you go to the theatre much ?

PAT : No ; I can't afford it.

BREWER : I suppose you wouldn't let *me* take you some time ? (HEC. *grimaces at her behind BREWER's back.*) Would you ?

PAT (*awkward*) : I . . . I don't know.

[*Telephone rings. BREWER answers it.*]

BREWER : Hullo. Yes. No, I'm afraid he's out. This is Brewer speaking. Yes, I know about that. What ? Well, hold on a minute and I'll look it up. (*He puts down receiver and one of the plugs and goes out R.*)

HEC. (*moving forward*) : Look here.

PAT : What ?

HEC. : What do you let that chap talk to you like that for ?

PAT : Like what ?

HEC. : Like he did. "Where do you live ?

What do you do in the evenings ? ” What’s it got to do with him ?

PAT : He was only being friendly.

HEC. : Blasted cheek.

PAT : Don’t be silly.

HEC. : You work for him, anyway. I don’t believe in mixing business with . . . being friendly.

PAT : Why not ?

HEC. : Because it’s all wrong. Specially when it’s a chap and a girl like that. You’re here to work, aren’t you ? This is an office, isn’t it ?

PAT : Well, that’s no reason why it should be like a prison. You can be friendly about it.

HEC. : No, you can’t. I know what it leads to.

PAT : What does it lead to ?

HEC. (*uncomfortable*) : You know just as well as I do. I don’t think a girl ought to work for a young chap like that. In a lawyer’s office, too! And with *me* here !

PAT : He didn’t know who you were.

HEC. : All the more reason, then. I might have been anybody. How long’s he been going on like that ?

PAT (*exasperated*) : Like what ?

HEC. : Like that. Making up to you . . . asking you to go out with him. . . .

PAT : This was the first time.

HEC. : And it had better be the last. Next time he starts anything you can refer him to me.

PAT : Oh ?

HEC. : Yes !

PAT : And then what’ll you do ?

HEC. : Black his eye for him, like as not.

PAT : Oh, yes.

HEC. : I would. He ought to leave you alone.

PAT (*annoyed*) : Well, why shouldn't he ask me out ?

HEC. : Oh, no reason. Theatre . . . restaurant . . . private rooms.

PAT : Don't be so silly.

HEC. : Well, you're not thinking of going, are you ?

PAT : I don't know. I might.

HEC. : You wouldn't.

PAT : Why not ? I don't get so much fun.

HEC. : I'll take you out if you want to go. . . . Why didn't you say ?

PAT : You can't, Hec.

HEC. : Why can't I ?

PAT : You can't afford it.

HEC. : Of course if you want stalls and dinner at the Piccadilly . . . or the Trocadero.

PAT : That's horrid of you.

HEC. : Well, I can take you to the theatre, can't I, if that's what you're so keen on. Why didn't you ask ?

PAT : I don't like you spending your money on me, Hec.

HEC. : Why not ?

PAT : You've got other things to do with it.

HEC. : I know.

PAT : You've got to save up for the future. But I don't go out much, and if Mr. Brewer asks me . . .

HEC. : Well, I don't want you to. See ?

PAT : Why not ?

HEC. : I don't want to see you get into a mess.

PAT : You and Miss Janus ! Anyone would think I was fifteen from the way you go on.

HEC. : What's *she* been saying ?

PAT : Much the same as you.

HEC. : Quite right, too.

PAT : Well, what are you doing here, anyway ?

HEC. : Oh . . . it's about that story . . . the one I gave you at lunch. You haven't started on it ?

PAT : Well, hardly !

HEC. : There's an alteration I don't know that you'll be able to read. Got some French in it, too. I just remembered. You got it there ?

PAT : In there. (*Pointing L.*)

HEC. : Well . . . could I show you ?

PAT : I'll get it.

[*She does so.*]

HEC. (*finding place—standing behind her—leaning over her, quite unaware of her physically—pointing to the corrections*): Look. There. That goes in there. See ?

[*Reading aloud :*]

“ Maurice was standing by the studio window watching the sun set over the Boulevard Montparnasse.” Then you put in that bit.

[*Miss JANUS enters and stands listening.*]

“ Mimi lay on the sofa watching him from beneath lowered lids. ‘ You are worried, *mon ami*,’ she murmured.” M.O.N. A.M.I. See ? It means “ my friend.” Then you go back here. “ He turned. ‘ If only somebody would buy one of my pictures,’ he muttered.” And then I’ve put in that bit, where the scriggle is, see ? “ ‘ Cheer up, *cheri*,’ she answered. ‘ It can’t go on for ever.’ ” Look : C.H.E.R.I. I’ll put the accents in myself, afterwards.



MISS JANUS (*who has been watching HEC.'s attitude with interest, now tries to pass behind PAT's chair to the cupboard at back*) : Excuse me.

HEC. (*jumping*) : I beg your pardon, miss. I didn't see you.

[*He moves.*]

MISS JANUS : Thanks.

[*She passes.*]

You seem to get a lot of time to yourself.

HEC. : What ? Oh . . . well, my job takes me out of the office a bit.

MISS JANUS : Where are you supposed to be now ?

[*Buzzer goes twice.*]

PAT (*starts*) : That's for me.

HEC. : Mr. Walker ?

PAT : No, he's out. That's Mr. Windermere's room. I didn't know he was back. I'll do that when I can, Hec.

HEC. : Can I see you home to-night ?

PAT : I think I'd better stay and start on it.

HEC. : Well, p'raps it would be better.

[*Buzzer again.*]

PAT : I must fly.

[*Dashes into room L., returns at once with shorthand notebook and goes out R.*]

MISS JANUS : Is that something you've written ?

HEC. : Yes.

MISS JANUS : A story ?

HEC. : Yes.

MISS JANUS : What about ?

HEC. : Well . . . artists . . . in Paris, Montmartre. You know, like the picture . . . *Sous les Toits* . . .

MISS JANUS : Have you ever been there ?

HEC. : No, but . . . well, I've read about it.

MISS JANUS : Is it a love-story ?

HEC. (*definitely*) : No.

MISS JANUS : Who's Mimi ?

HEC. : She's another artist. Shares a studio with the chap the story's about.

MISS JANUS : Do you mean they live together ?

HEC. : Yes.

MISS JANUS : In sin ?

HEC. : No, of course not.

MISS JANUS : Just platonic ?

HEC. : Yes.

MISS JANUS : And do you think anybody's going to swallow that ?

HEC. : Why not ?

MISS JANUS : Oh, well . . .

*[She busies herself at the cupboard.]*

HEC. : I say, miss. Can I speak to you ?

MISS JANUS : I should think so.

HEC. : Well . . . this chap, Brewer . . .

MISS JANUS (*interested*) : What about him ?

HEC. : What sort of chap is he ?

MISS JANUS : Why d'you ask ?

HEC. : Well, he was making up to Pat here just now . . . asking her to go out with him to the theatre.

MISS JANUS : Oh ? Well ?

HEC. : Well, I don't like it.

MISS JANUS : *You* don't ? Why ?

HEC. : Well, he looks like my idea of a pretty fair sort of cad. . . .

MISS JANUS : That's right.

HEC. : Well, then . . .

MISS JANUS : But why should *you* mind ?

HEC. : Well, Pat and I are friends.

MISS JANUS : Oh, I see. Like Mimi and What's-his-name.

HEC. : Yes. I wish you'd speak to her about it.

MISS JANUS : Me ? Why don't you ?

HEC. : I have, but she didn't seem to take it very well, and I thought p'raps if you talked to her . . . after all, you're a woman and a lot older than she is . . .

MISS JANUS : Are you jealous of Brewer ?

HEC. : Jealous ? No, but . . .

MISS JANUS : Are you keen on Pat ?

HEC. : Keen ? Well, we're friends.

MISS JANUS : Is that all ?

HEC. : What d'you mean ?

MISS JANUS : You're not in love with her ?

HEC. : Of course not.

MISS JANUS : Then I don't know what right you think you've got to stop her going out with whom she likes.

HEC. : I don't see what that's got to do with it.

MISS JANUS : Don't you ? You're *sure* you're not in love with her ?

HEC. : Yes.

[*Pause.*

At least, I've never thought about it.

MISS JANUS : Well, I should begin, if I were you.

HEC. : Well, I *like* her, of course. I'm *fond* of her.

MISS JANUS : Oh, well, perhaps it's the same thing.

[HEC. *looks worried.*

You needn't look as if I'd said I thought you'd got consumption.

HEC. : It isn't that.

MISS JANUS : What is it, then ?

HEC. : Well . . . it's a difficult thing to say . . .

MISS JANUS : Come on, cough it up.

HEC. : Well, you don't think that Pat . . .

MISS JANUS : What ?

HEC. : Well, you don't think *she* thinks that I'm in love with her ?

MISS JANUS (*dryly*) : You haven't given her any cause, have you ?

HEC. : No. No, never. Unless she thinks my going on about this chap, Brewer, was because I was jealous. (*With a flash*) You don't think that was why she did it, do you ? To *make* me jealous ?

MISS JANUS : You've been going to the pictures too much, young man. Why should she want to make you jealous ?

HEC. : You never know with women. They're so mysterious.

MISS JANUS : Too true ! Too true !

HEC. : You needn't make fun of me.

MISS JANUS : You're not flattering yourself by any chance that Pat's in love with *you* ?

HEC. (*uncertainly*) : N . . . no. No, of course not.

MISS JANUS : That's right.

HEC. : She's not, is she ?

MISS JANUS : Well, I ask you . . . is it likely ?



HEC. : She might be.

MISS JANUS : Oh !

HEC. : But she's not, though, is she ?

MISS JANUS : No. Disappointed ?

HEC. (*not too convincingly*) : No, of course not. Here, I must be going. I've been out too long as it is. Well, will you speak to Pat ?

MISS JANUS : I don't know.

HEC. : Why not ? You don't want her to go out with that chap.

MISS JANUS : She's got to go out with somebody.

HEC. : Well, I'll take her out, only I can't do it swank, like he can. I wish you'd speak to her.

MISS JANUS : It's none of my business.

HEC. : Yes, it is. She's awfully young. She doesn't know what he's after.

MISS JANUS : What is he after ?

HEC. : Well, what do you s'pose ? . . . Oh, Pat can take care of herself, I know, when it comes to it, but . . .

MISS JANUS : Well, that's all right, then, if she can take care of herself . . . "when it comes to it." There's no harm in a bit of kissing, is there ?

HEC. : Yes, there is ! I say, I must go. Won't you speak to her ?

MISS JANUS (*imperturbably*) : No.

HEC. : Oh, Hell !

[*He kicks the table and goes out angrily. MISS JANUS laughs, picks up his story and looks at it. MISS BUFTON comes in R. A fluffy blonde—she carries the "Play Pictorial" and a paper of the "Home Chat" order.*]

MISS BUFTON : Hullo.

MISS JANUS (*not agreeably*) : Oh, hullo.

MISS BUFTON : Anyone been ringing for me ?

MISS JANUS : Don't think so.

MISS BUFTON : Thank goodness. I'm ever so late. I didn't think I'd *ever* get away. (*No response.*) Oh dear, I *don't* feel like work this afternoon. I was *so* late last night, I went to the theatre . . . that's three late nights running this week.

MISS JANUS (*sarcastic*) : How awful.

MISS BUFTON : Well, it is ! I just *can't* get up in the morning if I've been out late the night before. (*Pause.*) And cocktails at lunch aren't good for *anyone*, I'm sure.

MISS JANUS : Why d'you have 'em, then ?

MISS BUFTON (*pleased to get her cue at last*) : I don't usually . . . I never do. I don't really *like* them, anyway. Only to-day my friend insisted. He said I was looking so tired. At least, it wasn't really a cocktail. Only a gin-and-Italian. He took me to the Great Eastern to lunch.

MISS JANUS : I say !

MISS BUFTON : I don't really like being taken out like that in the middle of the day. I'm no good at all for work in the afternoon. I shall probably fall fast asleep over my machine. Is everyone still out ?

MISS JANUS : Our lord is. High wind in Jamaica's back. Pat's in with him. Oh, here she is.

[PAT *returns*. MISS JANUS *goes into her room*.

MISS BUFTON (*pulling off her hat*) : Oh dear ! I do wish I hadn't had that cocktail.

PAT : Has someone been taking you out to lunch ?

MISS BUFTON : Yes. Great Eastern. It seems waste in the City, though, somehow, doesn't it ? I mean, when you've only got an hour. I simply *raced* back. But we had a lovely lunch . . . and we had asparagus. I had some last night, too, at Frascati's.

PAT : Where's that ?

MISS BUFTON : Frascati's ? In Oxford Street . . . haven't you ever been there ?

PAT : No, is it nice ?

MISS BUFTON : Ever so. We had a lovely dinner, and they played *Madame Butterfly*.

PAT : What have you got there ?

MISS BUFTON : This ? It's the *Play Pictorial*.

PAT : Can I look ? *Madame Fleur-de-Lys*. That's at Drury Lane, isn't it ? I do want to see it.

MISS BUFTON : I went last night.

PAT : Was it nice ?

MISS BUFTON : Lovely. It's all about the French Revolution. Wonderfully staged. We had stalls. I don't usually like being so close, because you can see all the make-up and everything, and I think it spoils it, but these were about half-way back and just right.

PAT (*who has been turning over the pages—stopping at a picture*) : Is she good ?

MISS BUFTON : Yes, she's got a lovely voice. And she wears the most beautiful dresses. I do think powdered hair's becoming to men, don't you ? He's awfully good-looking. (*Pointing to picture*) That's where they sing the duet in prison, and the crowd burst in with the chorus. My friend bought me the music in the interval.

PAT : I wish I could see it.

MISS BUFTON : Well, I must go up and wash.

[*Goes L.*

PAT : Can I look at this a minute ?

MISS BUFTON : Of course. Don't make it dirty, though. (*She returns with her towel and goes out R.*)

[PAT *sits looking at the pictures, thoughtfully.*  
BREWER *returns.*

BREWER : Why so pensive, gentle maiden ?

[PAT *starts and then laughs—puts paper aside and returns to her work.*

BREWER : What's that ?

PAT : It's Miss Bufton's.

BREWER (*looking at it*) : Have you seen this ?

PAT : No.

BREWER : Would you like to ?

PAT : I would, rather.

BREWER : Will you come with me ?

PAT (*after a moment's hesitation, shakes her head*) : No.

BREWER : No ?

PAT : No . . . really . . . thanks awfully.

BREWER : Why not ?

PAT : I . . . I'd rather not.

BREWER : Why ? If you want to see it ? Don't you like me ?

PAT : Please. . . .

BREWER : I wish you would. I'd like to take you.

PAT : No, really.

BREWER : Why not ? Where's the harm in it ? You're not afraid of me, are you ?

PAT : No, of course not.

BREWER : Well, then . . . ?

PAT : But it isn't right.

BREWER : Of course it's right. You ask Aunt Agatha.

PAT : Who's Aunt Agatha ?

BREWER : In *Home Bothers*. (*Picks up other paper ; opens it and pretends to read.*) " Pat. London Wall. Yes, dear, it is quite right for you to go to the theatre with the gentleman if he asks you."

PAT (*laughing*) : You are absurd !



BREWER : Well . . . so are you to refuse ! You will come, won't you ? When will you come ? To-night ?

PAT : I can't to-night. I've got some typing to do.

BREWER : To-morrow night ?

PAT : I might to-morrow night.

BREWER : Well, shall we take it as fixed ? I'd like to get tickets.

PAT : It's awfully nice of you.

BREWER : And you'll have some dinner with me first ?

PAT : No, I . . .

BREWER : You've got to eat, haven't you ? And so have I. Why shouldn't we do it together ?

PAT : What do I wear ?

BREWER : Your prettiest frock. You can change here, can't you ?

PAT : Yes, upstairs.

BREWER : That's settled, then.

PAT : It's awfully nice of you. Bufton says it's a lovely play.

[BREWER smiles and goes out R.]

PAT goes on looking at the pictures—sighs—puts paper down, and returns to her work. MISS JANUS comes in. She looks round half warily and goes to telephone. MISS JANUS asks for the number of Netherlands Legation, and holds on.

(Looking up) Private ?

MISS JANUS : It's all right.

PAT : Why don't you go into Mr. Walker's room ?

MISS JANUS : He'll be back any minute. (*Into 'phone*) Hullo, is that the Netherlands Legation ? Capt. Kellendonck, please. (*Holds on.*) You've been a long time on that. Brewer been down here talking to you ?

PAT : Just for a minute.

Miss JANUS : He seems to have upset Hec. all right.

Miss JANUS (*into 'phone*) : Hello ! Jan ? Look here, what about to-night ? Why not ? What ? Flying over ? Look here, you promised me you . . . yes, I know, but I hate it. . . . When shall I see you, then ? You know I can't on Thursdays. . . . It's the one night I've *got* to stay at home . . . (*breaks off, aware of PAT*) You *can't* ring me up. You know how difficult it is here. You can just as easily fix it now. Oh, very well. How are you ? All right ? Oh, I'm sorry. Good-bye.

[*She puts down the receiver and goes into the typists' room without a word.*]

PAT *looks after her.* Miss BUFTON *returns.*

Miss BUFTON : Oh dear, I never felt so little like work.

PAT (*suddenly*) : I say, Bufton.

Miss BUFTON : What ?

PAT : I want to ask you something.

Miss BUFTON : What is it ?

PAT : I wonder if you'd do me an awfully big favour ?

Miss BUFTON : What ?

PAT : Are you going out anywhere to-morrow night ?

Miss BUFTON : Not me. I must be a good girl and go to bed early the rest of this week. I've been out late three nights running. Why ?

PAT : Well . . . I wondered . . . you see I've been asked out, and I wondered if you could possibly lend me your evening coat. I'd take great care of it.

Miss BUFTON : Well . . .

PAT : You see, I haven't got one of my own. And Dorice—that's the girl I live with—she hasn't either.

MISS BUFTON : What do you always wear ?

PAT : Well, I don't go out very much, but I usually wear my tweed coat. Only, this is . . . well, I rather wanted to look nice, and . . .

MISS BUFTON : You will take care of it ?

PAT (*nods earnestly*) : Um.

MISS BUFTON : It crushes awfully easily.

PAT : I know. I've seen you with it. It's lovely.

MISS BUFTON : It is nice, isn't it. All right, then. I'll bring it up in the morning.

PAT : It's awfully sweet of you.

MISS BUFTON : Where are you going ? Theatre ? (*PAT nods.*) What are you going to see ?

PAT (*almost speaks and then thinks better of it*) : I . . . I don't know.

MISS BUFTON (*picking up "Play Pictorial"*) : You ought to go to this.

PAT : I'd like to.

MISS BUFTON : Going with someone nice ?

PAT : I think so.

MISS BUFTON : I say ! You *are* coming on. I thought you didn't go out with chaps.

PAT : Why shouldn't I ?

MISS BUFTON : That's what I say.

[BREWER *returns*.

BREWER : Oh, Miss Bufton, what about those affidavits ?

MISS BUFTON : Oh, Mr. Brewer, they aren't done yet. I'm *ever* so sorry, but Mr. Walker was dictating nearly all the morning.

BREWER : Well, there's no tearing hurry.

MISS BUFTON : I'll do them as soon as ever I can.

*[Moves towards door.]*

BREWER (*picking up "Home Bothers"*) : Is this yours ?

MISS BUFTON : Oh, yes, thanks.

BREWER (*opening it*) : "Anxious mother. Certainly you should feed Baby if your health permits it."

*[Miss BUFTON giggles.]*

"Is it all right to let a boy kiss you the first time he takes you out ? It is inadvisable to do so, Pansy. I do not mean that there is any harm in a kiss, but it robs your flirtation of any spice of piquancy or adventure."

"Lettuce. South Shields. The correct answer to 'How-do-you-do' is 'Quite well, thank you—and you ?' "

*[At the end of this speech MR. WALKER has appeared at door, R. He is a stern, but kindly man of about 55—wears dark coat and striped trousers, etc.]*

MR. WALKER : Oh, Brewer, just a minute. . . .

*[MISS BUFTON vanishes into the typists' room. PAT takes up her work, and goes out R., saying "Excuse me."]*

I wish you wouldn't waste the girls' time like that. I'm always finding you down here, gossiping with them. I've told you before.

*[BREWER is a little shamefaced.]*

If you've nothing to do, you should stay in your own room. I know it's very small, but I can't have you hanging around the office like this. And it's a bad thing to be as friendly with the girls as that. You might have a little more sense.



BREWER : I'm sorry, sir.

MR. WALKER : Well, don't let it happen again. This isn't the first time, you know. And I don't like the way you speak to them, at the best of times. It's all very well to be pleasant, but there are limits. That's all.

[BREWER goes. MR. WALKER opens door L.

Is Miss Janus in there ?

MISS JANUS : Yes, Mr. Walker.

[*She appears, transformed in his presence to a quiet secretary.*

MR. WALKER : How's that brief getting on ?

MISS JANUS : It's about half done.

MR. WALKER : I'd like it to go to Counsel tonight. Can you manage it ?

MISS JANUS : I think so, Mr. Walker.

MR. WALKER : And you might tell Miss Hooper I shall probably want her to stay late, if she can manage it. Are your letters done ?

MISS JANUS : They're on your table, Mr. Walker.

MR. WALKER : Good.

[*He goes out R.*

PAT reappears, passing him.

PAT : Did he say anything ?

MISS JANUS : What about ?

PAT : He caught Bufton and Mr. Brewer and me wasting time.

MISS BUFTON (*appearing at door*) : It was awful. I didn't know where to look.

MISS JANUS : Well, let's hope he told little Eric off.

[*Buzzer.*

PAT : That's for Hooper.

MISS JANUS : She's not back yet.

PAT : P'raps I'd better go. Oh, here she is.

[MISS HOOPER *comes in L.*

MISS JANUS : Our lord's back. Screaming for you.

[*Buzzer again.*

There he goes. Wants you to stay late to-night, too.

MISS HOOPER (*pulling off hat*) : Blast ! I wanted to be up West by seven.

MISS BUFTON : Well, tell him.

MISS HOOPER (*passing her—into inner room*) : Oh, yes.

MISS BUFTON : I would !

MISS HOOPER : Likely. Where's my blasted note-book ?

[*A different buzzer : three rings.*

MISS BUFTON : That's me.

[*Fetches note-book.*

MISS HOOPER (*returning*) : I say, Blanche, could you ring up Douglas and tell him I'll be late ? Say I'll get there when I can.

[*First buzzer again.*

All right ! All right ! I'm coming !

[*Dashes out, colliding with BIRKINSHAW, who returns with a bag of biscuits.*

Out of my way, you !

[*Vanishes.*

MISS JANUS : Here are the biscuits. Tea, thank God !

MISS BUFTON : I'm dying for it.

[*Telephone goes. Second buzzer again.*

Wait a minute, can't you ? Keep mine hot.

[*She goes.*

BIRKINSHAW (*answering 'phone*) : Hullo, Walker, Windermere. Who's speaking? One minute, please.

[*Puts down plug and exits.*]

PAT (*opening bag of biscuits*) : Oh, he's got ginger-nuts.

MISS JANUS : Just because I told him not to.

[*MISS WILLESSEN appears again at door.*]

MISS WILLESSEN : Oh . . . excuse me . . . but . . . I think I just saw Mr. Walker come in, and . . . I wondered whether perhaps he could see me now . . . just for a minute.

MISS JANUS : I'm afraid he's engaged, Miss Willesden.

MISS WILLESSEN : Oh . . . oh, I see. Oh, very well. I'll write.

[*MISS JANUS goes into typists' room.*]

To PAT :

You're new here, aren't you?

PAT (*timidly*) : Yes.

MISS WILLESSEN : Yes . . . Yes, I thought so. You're very pretty. You must make the most of it. . . . It doesn't last. Don't stay here too long . . . like her.

[*Gesture to inner door.*]

Find a nice man, and marry him . . . while you're young. It doesn't last, you know.

[*With a change of thought :*]

Engaged, is he? Oh, well, then, I'll write. Yes, I'll write. Good-bye.

PAT : Good-bye.

[*MISS WILLESSEN trails out. PAT is left alone.*]

CURTAIN

## ACT II

### SCENE I

SCENE : MR. WALKER'S room. *Three o'clock in the afternoon. About three weeks later. A large desk, placed up and down stage, R., with a revolving chair back to the wall. Another chair (for clients) the other side of the desk. Windows behind swivel-chair in R. wall. Door down stage L. Filing cabinet centre back wall. Bookcase with law Reports, etc., centre of L. wall. Safe in R. corner of back wall : cupboard for hats and coats in L. corner of back wall. A few prints on the walls.*

*This should be a small set, capable of being set within the other.*

*When the curtain rises PAT is sitting at the desk, talking at the telephone.*

PAT (*into 'phone*) : No, Mr. Walker left those blank in the letter. He asked me to get the particulars from you on the telephone. No, he's gone for the day—but if you'll give me them, I can send the letter off to-night. Yes. I'm ready.

[BREWER comes in. *He watches her amusedly, while she listens and writes in her shorthand notebook. Then he steals behind her, stands there for a moment and then leans over and kisses the back of her neck. She wriggles and tries to beat him off with her left hand.*

I'm sorry. I didn't catch that. Was that D or B ? B for . . .

BREWER : Brewer.

PAT (*whispering and waving him away*) : Go away !

[*Into 'phone* :

Would you spell it, please ? Oh, D. D for dance.

BREWER : Or darling.

PAT : E.



BREWER : For Eric.

PAT : T ? T or P ? P for . . .

BREWER : Pat.

PAT : P for Patrick. T for . . .

BREWER : To-night.

PAT : T for teetotaller. F or S ? F ? F for freedom ?  
Freedom or France.

BREWER : Or fun ?

PAT : Oh, Deptford ! Yes, I've got it. Deptford.

BREWER : Where the dukes come from !

PAT : Thanks very much. Yes, I'll see that goes  
to-night. Thank you. Good-bye.

*[Puts receiver down.]*

You *are* bad !

BREWER : Am I ?

*[Holds out his hand.]*

Come here.

PAT : No.

BREWER : Why not ?

PAT : I don't want to.

BREWER : I want to kiss you.

PAT : No.

BREWER : Why not ? You've let me kiss you  
before. . . .

PAT : Not in the office.

BREWER : Well, it'll be a new experience for you.

PAT : I oughtn't to have let you kiss me at all.

BREWER (*approaching her*) : Oh, Pat . . .

PAT (*moving to door*) : No. I've got work to do.

BREWER (*seemingly careless*) : Oh, by the way,  
I thought to-night, instead of going out any-  
where we might have dinner at my flat.

*[PAT stares at him.]*

What's the matter ? Don't you want to ?

PAT : No.

BREWER : Why not ?

PAT : I'd rather go out somewhere.

BREWER : Still afraid of me ?

PAT : Of course not.

BREWER : Well, then . . .

PAT : I'd rather not.

BREWER : But why ? I've got it all prepared and everything.

[PAT *looks troubled*.

Won't you come ?

PAT : I oughtn't to.

BREWER : What would your boy friend say ?  
Eh ?

PAT : It isn't that.

BREWER : He gave me the dirtiest look when I passed him on the stairs this morning. Does he know you've been going out with me ?

PAT : I don't know.

BREWER : Haven't you told him ?

PAT : No. It's none of his business.

BREWER : Quite. Why did you tell Miss Janus ?

PAT : I didn't.

BREWER : How does she know, then ?

PAT (*returning*) : Does she ?

BREWER : She does. She's been trying to warn me off you.

PAT (*flaring up*) : Well, she's got no right to.

BREWER : Why does she dislike me so ?

PAT : I don't know. At least . . .

BREWER : At least ?

PAT : She says you're dangerous.

BREWER : Does she ? Do you think I am ?

PAT : No.

BREWER : That's right. Of course I'm not. You know I wouldn't do you any harm for the world, don't you ? Don't you ?

[PAT *nods*.

You're awfully sweet.

PAT : Don't.

BREWER : Why should you mind my telling you ? Just because it's in the office ? I'll tell you to-night, then.

[*Seductively*.

My little Pat ! So Miss Janus thinks I'm dangerous, does she ? Dangerous to you, or dangerous to her ?

PAT : To me, I suppose.

BREWER : She's probably jealous.

PAT : Why ?

BREWER : Of my taking you out. I took her out once.

PAT : You did ?

BREWER : Yes, only to dinner after we'd been working late one evening, when I first came here. It wasn't much fun. I've never repeated the experiment, but I have an idea she's rather expected me to.

PAT (*quite sincerely*) : Yes, perhaps.

BREWER : She evidently considers me fascinating, if she thinks I'm dangerous to you.

[*Smiling*.

Do you know I shouldn't be surprised if she cherished quite a secret passion for me ?

PAT : She's got a fiancé, you know.

BREWER (*ragging*) : Well, she had to do something, hadn't she ? Do you know what he's like ?

PAT : No. I don't think he treats her very well, though.

BREWER : There you are ! You see, it's not the real thing.

[*Enter BIRKINSHAW.*

BREWER : What is it ?

BIRKINSHAW : Aunt Sally's outside.

BREWER : Eh ?

BIRKINSHAW : Miss Willesden.

BREWER : Oh. Oh, yes. Yes, I've got to see her. I'll see her upstairs in my room.

BIRKINSHAW : You've never seen anything like the way she's rigged out.

[*He laughs and goes.*

PAT *goes over to filing cabinet to get some papers.*

MISS JANUS *comes in.*

MISS JANUS : Did you get those particulars all right ?

PAT (*very shortly*) : Yes.

MISS JANUS : Anything you don't understand ?

PAT (*as before*) : No.

MISS JANUS : Anything the matter ?

PAT : No. Why ?

MISS JANUS : Well, you sound a bit old-fashioned-like to me.

PAT : Oh ?

MISS JANUS : What's up ?

PAT (*turning on her suddenly*) : I wish you wouldn't interfere with my affairs.

MISS JANUS : Oh ? Going out with him again to-night, aren't you ?

PAT : How do you know ? Who ? How do you know I've been out with him at all ?

MISS JANUS : Bufton's brought up her evening cloak again.



PAT : Has *she* been talking ? I wish I'd never borrowed it.

MISS JANUS : No, she hasn't. But I've got a little imagination. And I can put two and two together. Do you like going out with him ?

PAT : Yes, I do.

MISS JANUS : That's right. So he's behaved himself, so far.

PAT : I don't know what you mean.

MISS JANUS : Don't you ? You will. Wait till he asks you to his flat.

[PAT *looks startled*.

And don't say I didn't warn you, that's all. Look here. Pat, don't be a little fool. Don't go and get yourself into a mess for the sake of a few theatre tickets.

PAT : Have you quite finished ?

MISS JANUS : No.

PAT : Well, I want to get on with my work.

[*Moves to door*.

MISS JANUS (*standing in front of it*) : Just a minute. Have you seen Hec. lately ?

PAT : What has it got to do with you ?

MISS JANUS : Quite a lot. I'm your best friend. You don't know it, but it's true. You know, you're making Hec. very unhappy.

PAT : That's too bad.

MISS JANUS : I can't think what's come over you lately. At least, I can. Brewer's come over you. And you're worried about it, too. You're beginning to wish you hadn't started it, aren't you ?

PAT : No.

MISS JANUS : Oh, yes you are. You're beginning to get scared. I know.

PAT : It's not true. I'm going out with him to-night, and I'm going to his flat to dinner. There ! That shows how scared I am.

MISS JANUS (*slowly*) : Are you ?

PAT : Yes, I am. And nothing you say can stop me. Anyway, you only try because you're jealous.

MISS JANUS : What's that ?

PAT : Because you're keen on him yourself. Because he took you out once, and then never again.

MISS JANUS : Wait a minute. What's all this about ?

PAT : It's true. You know it's true.

MISS JANUS : Who told you that ?

PAT : Never mind.

MISS JANUS : He did—uh ?

PAT (*repentant*) : I oughtn't to have said it.

MISS JANUS : No, I don't think you ought. But now you have said it, we'll get to the bottom of it.

PAT (*scared*) : No.

MISS JANUS : He said I was jealous, did he ?

PAT : No. No. I made that up.

MISS JANUS : Oh, no, you didn't. Did you ? Did you ?

[PAT *doesn't answer.*

All right. Now, then. He said I was jealous. He said I was keen on him myself. Eh ?

PAT (*whispering*) : Yes.

MISS JANUS : Nice of him, wasn't it ? Do you believe it ? Do you ?

PAT : I don't know.

MISS JANUS : Well, do you think it was nice of him to say so ?

PAT : No. I suppose it wasn't. You won't tell him I told you ?

MISS JANUS : No ?

PAT : No, you mustn't. You won't, will you ? Promise ?

MISS JANUS : All right, I promise.

PAT : You're not keen on him ?

MISS JANUS : What do you take me for ?

PAT : Then why do you mind my going out with him ?

MISS JANUS : Well, for one thing because I hate to see you giving him corroborative evidence for his theory that he's irresistible to women. And for another because he's not your kind. If you were Bufton it wouldn't matter. She's the sort that does slop about with men. . . . Flirtation's her game, and she knows all the rules . . . she makes them . . . and she sees that they're kept, too. But I should chuck this, if I were you. Make it up with Hec. Why don't you ?

PAT : There's nothing to make up.

MISS JANUS : Oh, I know he's slow and young and silly . . . but you're fond of him. And that's something too valuable to play with.

PAT : I don't know what you mean.

*[Suddenly bursting into angry tears.]*

Oh, why can't you leave me alone ? Why shouldn't I enjoy myself ? Where's the fun in sitting in an Express Dairy with somebody once a week . . . or paying for myself at the pictures ? That's what I did with Hec. Oh, I know he can't afford it. It isn't that. And I wouldn't mind if . . . if I thought he . . .

MISS JANUS : What ?

PAT : Oh, leave me alone ! Why shouldn't he take me out ? You *are* jealous. I know you are. Just because your own fiancé doesn't want to

take *you* out . . . because you have to run after him . . .

[*She stops at sight of Miss JANUS' stricken face.*  
I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say that.

MISS JANUS : You'd better go.

PAT : No. I'm sorry. Forgive me. I didn't mean it. Forgive me.

MISS JANUS (*after a very brief pause*) : All right.

PAT : I didn't mean it.

MISS JANUS : It's all right. Don't worry.

[*She goes out.*

PAT *returns to the cabinet. Door opens and Miss WILLESSEN comes in, followed by BREWER.*

BREWER : If you'll wait here, in Mr. Walker's room, Miss Willesden, I'll see if your Will is ready for you to sign.

MISS WILLESSEN : Oh, thank you.

[BREWER *places chair for her and—goes.*

To PAT :

Good afternoon.

PAT : Good afternoon.

MISS WILLESSEN : Mr. Walker is out, then ?

PAT : Yes. He won't be back this afternoon.

MISS WILLESSEN : Oh ! Oh, yes. Yes, I'm glad. I thought perhaps . . . it wasn't true. Mr. Walker never sees me any more. He always used to attend to my affairs himself; of course, his practice was smaller then, and he was glad enough to have my business.

PAT (*very uncomfortable*) : Oh, I don't think . . .

MISS WILLESSEN : You know all about my affairs, I suppose . . . being in the office ? I suppose you do . . . discuss . . . clients' business . . . sometimes ?



PAT : Not discuss it . . . no. I type some of the letters, of course, but . . .

MISS WILLESSEN : What do you think of this law-suit of mine ?

PAT : I don't really know about it.

MISS WILLESSEN : Nor about that one I had last year ?

PAT : No.

MISS WILLESSEN : Oh, that was monstrous. Monstrous. The Judge had been bribed. I'm convinced of that. I wrote to the Home Secretary . . . several times . . . but I got no reply. . . . You see, my dear, when you get to my age . . . and you have a little money . . . people try and take advantage of you. And the law doesn't protect you. It should, of course, but it doesn't. Old age is a very sad thing, you know.

PAT (*frightened*) : Yes . . .

MISS WILLESSEN : And loneliness is a worse one. Whenever I see a pretty young girl like you, I always think : " What will she be when she is old ? Will she have someone to look after her ? Will she have someone to look after ? " Because that's almost as important, you know. I've no one. You know this case of mine is all because I wanted someone to look after . . . so I thought . . . as I had no one of my own . . . that I'd adopt somebody. Of course, it ought to have been a baby . . . I see that now . . . but I thought perhaps I shouldn't live long enough . . . so I adopted a young man. An artist, he was, you know, with no money. I thought I was old enough for there not to be any scandal about it. And you know what happened.

PAT : He ran away with some money, didn't he ?

MISS WILLESSEN : Five hundred pounds it was. It was a dreadful shock to me. I was very ill at first . . . my heart, you know, it isn't right. But

you see what I mean by people taking advantage of you. But that's quite enough about me and my troubles. Tell me something about yourself, won't you?

PAT : Me ?

MISS WILLESSEN : What's your name ?

PAT : Milligan.

MISS WILLESSEN : Yes, I know. But your Christian name ?

PAT : Pat.

MISS WILLESSEN : Pat ?

PAT : Patricia.

MISS WILLESSEN : How old are you ?

PAT : Nineteen.

MISS WILLESSEN : You mustn't mind my asking you questions, like this . . . but, you see, I'm interested. I always think people are so interesting.

PAT : It's all right.

MISS WILLESSEN : Are your parents alive ?

PAT : No. They're dead.

MISS WILLESSEN : Then you're all alone ? Or have you any other relatives ? Brothers and sisters, perhaps ?

PAT : No.

MISS WILLESSEN : Dear me, And you work here . . . to earn your living ? You have to.

PAT : Yes.

MISS WILLESSEN : What do they pay you ?

PAT (*embarrassed*) : Well, I . . .

MISS WILLESSEN : Do they pay you well ? They ought to.

PAT : I think so.

MISS WILLESSEN : Five pounds a week ?

PAT (*laughing*) : Oh, no ! Not nearly as much as that. I'm only a shorthand typist.

MISS WILLESSEN : Three pounds ?

PAT (*smiling*) : No.

MISS WILLESSEN : What then ?

PAT : Well . . . well . . . thirty shillings.

MISS WILLESSEN : Thirty shillings a week ? And you live on that ?

PAT : Yes.

MISS WILLESSEN : But you can't . . . can you ?

PAT : I do.

MISS WILLESSEN : I really don't see how you can. I shall speak to Mr. Walker about it.

PAT : Oh, no, please, you mustn't do that.

MISS WILLESSEN : Why not ?

PAT : Oh, well . . . he'd think I'd been complaining. And anyway, it's perfectly all right. I've only been here two months . . . and lots of girls begin at less than that.

MISS WILLESSEN : Well, they oughtn't to. I shall certainly speak to Mr. Walker.

PAT : No, please, Miss Willesden, you mustn't . . . really. I should lose my job. Really, I should.

MISS WILLESSEN : Well, it seems very dreadful to me. Do you have a proper dinner in the evening, when you get home ?

PAT : We cook things . . . on the gas ring.

MISS WILLESSEN : Proper things ? Nourishing things ? Not things out of tins ?

PAT : Well, sometimes.

MISS WILLESSEN : You shouldn't, you know. I

don't like to think of your having to live like that at all. Supposing you were ill?

PAT : Well, there's the insurance . . .

MISS WILLESSEN : Yes . . . yes, I forgot that. That was Lloyd George, wasn't it? But still, I'm sure it's not the same. It seems very dreadful to me. And your prospects . . . what are they?

PAT : How do you mean?

MISS WILLESSEN : Well, if you stay here . . .

PAT : I'll get more money, I suppose . . .

MISS WILLESSEN : Much more?

PAT : No . . . not *much*, but . . .

MISS WILLESSEN : How much? What is the most you could earn if you stayed . . . for ten years, say . . . like that other girl outside?

PAT : I don't know. Three pounds . . . three pounds ten, perhaps.

MISS WILLESSEN : That isn't very much to look forward to. . . . Oh, I know money can be a curse . . . too much of it. But a little can be a great blessing. Don't you ever wonder, when you look at people like that other girl outside, what's going to happen to you . . . what you've got to look forward to?

PAT (*shivering slightly*) : No. I . . . I'm quite happy.

MISS WILLESSEN : That's a very wonderful thing to hear anybody say. I hope you always will be.

BREWER (*off, as he opens door*) : Would you mind coming in here a moment, Miss Janus?

[BREWER returns, followed by Miss JANUS. PAT quietly slips out.]

I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, Miss Willesden. It wasn't quite ready. I've got it here



now. Perhaps you'd like to read it through, and then if you'll excuse it, Miss Janus here and I will witness it for you.

MISS WILLESSEN : Yes . . . Yes . . . (*looks at her watch*). Oh, dear ! It's later than I thought (*hesitates*). I have an appointment . . . a firm I am afraid I shall have to bring an action against. I mustn't be late for it. I'll take this with me to read on the bus. Then I'll come back and sign it later, and if I have to bring my action . . . well . . . (*brightly*) it'll be two birds with one stone, won't it ? I hope it's not very inconvenient.

BREWER (*politely*) : Not at all.

MISS WILLESSEN : Well, I'll say au revoir, then.

BREWER (*opening door*) : Good afternoon.

MISS WILLESSEN (*to Miss JANUS*) : Good afternoon.

MISS JANUS : Good afternoon.

[BREWER *shows* MISS WILLESSEN *out*.

MISS JANUS *goes to filing cabinet*.

BREWER *returns*.

BREWER (*tapping his forehead*) : Mad. Quite, quite mad. What can one do with her, changing her mind every five minutes like that ?

MISS JANUS : Are you going to be in here ?

BREWER : I don't know. Why ?

MISS JANUS : I want to get on with the filing.

BREWER : Don't let me disturb you.

MISS JANUS : Do you think you could ?

[*She begins to file letters which she takes from a wire tray on the desk and to clip them on to various files which she takes from the cabinet.*

BREWER (*sitting on the desk*) :

“ How doth the little busy bee,  
Improve each shining hour . . . ? ”

MISS JANUS : Funny . . . don't you ?

BREWER : Miss Janus . . . (*with sudden, mock-dramatic intensity*) Why can we not be friends ? (*No answer.*) No reply ? You know, ever since Birkinshaw revealed to me the other day the existence of . . . another side of your life, I have felt differently towards you.

MISS JANUS : Oh, really . . . ?

BREWER : You see, Miss Janus, I have known you now . . . man and boy . . . for something approaching eleven months, and never have our relations been anything but strictly formal.

MISS JANUS (*addressing the ceiling*) : I've never sat on your knee, of course.

BREWER : Miss Janus, I hate to appear immodest, but I am a man with a not inconsiderable experience of women.

MISS JANUS : Really ?

BREWER : It may even surprise you to learn . . . who has had considerable success with women.

MISS JANUS : Are you now ?

BREWER : When therefore I noticed . . . that my sunny smile and pretty ways failed to make any impression on your rigid demeanour . . . I became depressed. I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep. Judge then of my relief when I learn that the fault lies . . . not in me, but in the fact merely that your heart was engaged elsewhere.

MISS JANUS : No other explanation ever occurred to you, I suppose ?

BREWER : Such as ?

MISS JANUS : Well . . . that I might have mistaken your attempts at fascination . . . they were rather peculiar, you know . . . and be nourishing a secret passion for you ?

BREWER : Well, scarcely.

MISS JANUS : You think that impossible ?

BREWER : I wouldn't say that.

MISS JANUS : I'm sure you wouldn't.

BREWER : But you haven't exhibited many signs of it.

MISS JANUS : I said " secret."

BREWER : Of course that's always possible.

MISS JANUS : Supposing I told you it was true ?

BREWER : I shouldn't believe you.

MISS JANUS : Oh, yes, you would. Any man would believe it of any woman.

BREWER : What rot !

MISS JANUS : It's true. Almost every man *does* believe it . . . of almost every woman, as it is.

BREWER : Believe what ?

MISS JANUS : That she's in love with him . . . or would be, if he raised his little finger. Do you know a single woman who you think would refuse you if you asked her to marry you ? Do you ?

BREWER : I haven't thought about it.

MISS JANUS : Well, think . . . and you'll find that you don't.

BREWER : What are you getting at ?

MISS JANUS : Nothing. But you do like to think that all women are crazy about you, don't you ?

BREWER : It is a pleasant thought.

MISS JANUS : But you'd hate them to tell you so, that's all.

BREWER : Why should I ?

MISS JANUS : You'd like to think I had a secret passion for you . . . but if I told you so, you'd pretend not to believe me, because it would

make you uncomfortable. And secretly you'd be no end thrilled.

BREWER : I *shouldn't* believe you.

MISS JANUS : Wouldn't you ?

BREWER (*slightly uncomfortable*) : No.

MISS JANUS (*fixing him with an intense gaze*) : Why wouldn't you ?

BREWER : Shut up !

MISS JANUS : Look at me.

BREWER (*very uncomfortable*) : No.

MISS JANUS : Why not ? You see, you half believe me already. My God, you're a beauty !

BREWER : What do you mean ?

MISS JANUS : Nothing. I've got the filing to get on with.

[*She turns to the cabinet, he looks at her, she turns, their eyes meet, she stares at him, he withdraws his, uncomfortably. She turns back again.*]

BREWER : I . . . I've got some work to do.

[*He goes out awkwardly. She laughs as the door shuts and then returns to the filing a moment ; looks at the telephone a moment and then goes to it ; sitting at desk.*]

MISS JANUS : Hullo ! (*Bangs hook.*) Hullo ! (*Bangs hook again.*) What are you doing out there ? Put me through to the Exchange, will you ? Hullo ! I want Welbeck 6787.

[*PAT comes in.*]

PAT : Have you got the Blumenkopf file ? It ought to be in Mr. Windermere's room. I can't find it anywhere.

MISS JANUS (*jerking her head at cabinet*) : See if it's got in there by mistake. Hullo, is that the Netherlands Legation ? Captain Kellendonck, please. (*Pause.*) (*Holds on.*) Hullo, is that you ? Yes. Listen, I shan't be able to get away to time



to-night . . . not till about a quarter past six. What? (*Disappointed.*) Why? Going away? Where? When? For long? What do you mean . . . you've written to me? Yes, but what's in it? You're being very mysterious. How long are you going for? A year? Transferred? But you never said anything about it! Has this just happened suddenly? Well, when do you leave? Six o'clock? To-night? Oh, six to-morrow morning. Are you flying to Holland? Well, I can see you to-night, can't I? (*Long pause.*) Oh! What's in that letter? No. I'd rather you told me now. I see. Me? No, I don't think it's been a mistake.

[*Her voice arrests PAT, who stands staring at her.* Well, if you say so. So this is good-bye, then? Yes, I suppose I have. I think you might have found a decenter way of doing it, though. All right. Good-bye.

[*She puts the receiver down, and stares before her.*  
*Half to herself:*

So that's that!

[*With a half sob:*  
God!

[*She puts her hand to her mouth, fighting tears.*  
PAT: What is it?

[*She goes to her.*  
MISS JANUS: Seven years! And now, like that . . . over the telephone!

PAT: He's going away?

MISS JANUS (*nods bitterly*): Just . . . going away. Going out East. "Transferred." As if it happened suddenly like that! Keeping it up his sleeve till the last minute! Wasn't even going to see me!

[*Mimicking:*  
"I've written to you."

[*Between angry tears:*

Bloody coward !

PAT (*putting her arms round her*) : Don't !

MISS JANUS (*mimicking again, between tears*) :  
" You must have known yourself it's been  
wearing thin." That's what he said !

[*Pause.*

And now what am I going to do ?

[*She cries more.*

PAT : Don't ! Miss Janus . . . Blanche, dear . . .  
don't !

MISS JANUS : Seven damned years.

PAT : You've been engaged for seven years ?

MISS JANUS : And now this ! Left . . . like that !

PAT : Do you love him very much ?

MISS JANUS (*looks at her blankly, as though not understanding the question. After a pause*) : No ! I did  
once . . . at least, I think I did. That's been  
gone a long time.

PAT : Then . . . ?

MISS JANUS : But I was going to marry him. I  
wanted to marry him.

PAT : Even though you didn't love him ?

MISS JANUS (*firmly*) : Yes.

PAT : Why ?

MISS JANUS : I wanted to get married. You can't  
expect love to last, anyway. And I'd had that.

[*Talking between her teeth.*

But I'd have been a good wife . . . and if we'd  
married something might have come back . . .  
anyway, I wanted to *be* married.

PAT : Why didn't you marry before ?

MISS JANUS : He kept putting it off at first . . .  
and then mother got ill, and I couldn't . . .

PAT : But your mother's dead, isn't she ?

MISS JANUS : Yes, she's been dead a year now. But he hasn't had so much reason to be keen these last three years.

PAT : What do you mean ?

MISS JANUS : He'd had all he wanted without marriage.

PAT : Oh . . . oh, you must have loved him !

MISS JANUS : I think I did. And now what's going to happen to me ? I haven't looked at another man for seven years. I haven't thought of another man.

PAT : There'll *be* someone else.

MISS JANUS : For me ? I'm thirty-five . . . and I've worn myself out . . . over him. And then he goes off and leaves me . . . tied to this office for the rest of my life . . . until I get too old even for that.

*[She is crying freely now, but goes on talking bitterly through her tears.]*

No ! I'll *make* him marry me. I don't care whether he wants to, or not. I've *got* to get married.

PAT (*shocked as well as sympathetic*) : Blanche !

MISS JANUS : Well, what else am I to do ? Stick here, and go on living at home looking after father ? I'm the only one left. And then he'll die . . . and then what is there ? Rooms . . . or a boarding house . . . or a club for women who can't get married ? Earning three pounds a week for the rest of my life ? No !

PAT : It can't be as bad as all that.

MISS JANUS (*breaking down completely*) : What am I going to do ? Oh, God ! What am I going to do ?

*[She buries her head on her arms.]*

[PAT does her best to comfort her.

PAT : Don't. Don't cry like that. Blanche, don't !

[A knock on the door.

Who's that ?

MISS JANUS (*starting up*) : Don't let anyone in !

[*She rises and goes to window, standing with her back to the door.*

BIRKINSHAW (*outside*) : Open the door, will you ? I've got the tea here.

PAT (*opening door*) : I'll take it.

BIRKINSHAW (*half in, half out*) : Mr. Brewer in here ?

PAT : No.

BIRKINSHAW : I'd better take his upstairs, then. This is Miss Janus's. I left yours outside.

PAT : All right.

[*She closes the door on him, and comes back to the room with a cup of tea and biscuits in the saucer.*

MISS JANUS (*turning, having pulled herself together*) : I'm sorry for behaving like that.

PAT : It's all right. I understand.

MISS JANUS : You needn't tell the others about this.

PAT : I wouldn't.

MISS JANUS (*smiling*) : I know. Was anyone outside listening on the 'phone ?

PAT : I don't think so. Birkinshaw was getting the tea. I put you through. Bufton and Miss Hooper were typing.

MISS JANUS : You'd better get your tea.

PAT : Don't let yours get cold.

[*She goes to door.*

I say . . . I'm awfully sorry about this afternoon.



MISS JANUS (*indicating telephone*) : What . . . this ?

PAT : No, me. I was horrid to you. I'm sorry.

MISS JANUS : That's all right. You're a nice child.

[PAT *smiles faintly and goes*. MISS JANUS *takes up her tea and stirs it*.

## CURTAIN

## SCENE II

SCENE : *The general office. A quarter to six the same evening and a general atmosphere of rush and getting the post off.*

BIRKINSHAW *is manipulating the press-copier at back. Sounds of typing from inner room whenever door is opened. MISS BUFTON comes in R. with note-book. The opening scene should be played extremely fast.*

BIRKINSHAW : Not more letters ?

MISS BUFTON : No.

BIRKINSHAW : Thank God for that. Yours all done ?

MISS BUFTON : Yes. You've got them there.

BIRKINSHAW : That the lot ?

MISS BUFTON : Yes.

[*Goes in L.*

MISS HOOPER *comes out*.

BIRKINSHAW : What about your letters, miss ?

MISS HOOPER : Haven't you got them ? They're on Mr. Windermere's table.

BIRKINSHAW : 'E 'asn't signed them. You going in there ? You might give 'is elbow a jog. I want to get off early to-night.

MISS HOOPER : Too bad about you.

BIRKINSHAW : Thought we would, too—Mr. Walker not coming back. What's the right time, miss ?

MISS HOOPER : Ten to six.

*[She goes out R.]*

BIRKINSHAW *opens door of typing room.*

BIRKINSHAW (*calling inside*) : Those enclosures ready for Huddleston ?

MISS JANUS (*off*) : Not yet.

BIRKINSHAW : Well, you might hurry.

*[He sits at table and begins stamping and entering letters in post book.]*

PAT *comes in from L.*

I say, miss . . .

PAT : What ?

BIRKINSHAW : I suppose you 'aven't time to help me with the post, have you ? I'd like to get off to time to-night.

PAT : All right.

BIRKINSHAW : There's a whole lot in the Oojah Capivvy now. If you'd just take 'em out and fold 'em and stick 'em in the envelopes, and bung 'em across to me, I'll enter 'em up.

PAT : All right.

*[She goes to the back, and starts doing as requested.]*  
BREWER *comes in.*

BIRKINSHAW : 'Ave. I got all your letters, sir ?

BREWER : I sent them down.

*[He looks at Pat.]*

MISS HOOPER *comes back R., carrying folder of letters.*

MISS HOOPER (*slamming it on table*) : There ! Mr. Windermere's just gone.

*[Goes in R.]*

BIRKINSHAW (*calling Pat*) : Miss !

[*Hands folder across.*]

BREWER (*to Pat*) : Why are you doing the post ?

BIRKINSHAW : Just givin' me a 'and, sir. I'm in a bit of a 'urry to get off to-night.

BREWER : Assingation ?

BIRKINSHAW : Police concert. Mr. Walker gave me tickets.

BREWER : I say ! Taking someone ? Have you got a girl, Birkinshaw ?

BIRKINSHAW : What yer think ?

BREWER : What's she like ?

BIRKINSHAW : Regular oner ! Trust Oswald.

BREWER : Who's Oswald ?

BIRKINSHAW : Me !

BREWER : Well, why doesn't she make you wash your neck ?

BIRKINSHAW : Likes it like that ! Last time I went, they 'ad a lot of girls doing Greek dancing. One of 'em tripped over the footlights. Coo, I didn't 'arf larf !

[*Leans over and opens door.*]

I say, miss. Did you do an envelope for Mrs. Armstrong ?

MISS BUFTON (*appearing*) : Oh, no, I forgot. I haven't got her address. We haven't written to her for ever so long.

BIRKINSHAW : It's in the old letter-book.

MISS BUFTON : Well, you might look it up for me, and I'll do one.

BIRKINSHAW (*persuasive*) : Do you mind looking it up yourself, miss ? I want to get off early.

MISS BUFTON : Oh, all right.

[*She goes to the back.*]

MISS JANUS *comes out, carrying a long envelope which she gives to BIRKINSHAW.*

MISS JANUS : There you are.

BIRKINSHAW : Thank you, miss.

[*Looks at it—folds letter, puts it in and licks it up.*]

MISS JANUS : I'll do the post if you want to get off. Mr. Walker asked me to stay till quarter past, anyway, in case he came back.

BIRKINSHAW : Oh, thank you, miss. I'll just finish this lot, then—and there's only what Miss Milligan's got, left to do.

MISS BUFTON : I can't find it.

MISS JANUS : What are you looking for ?

MISS BUFTON : Mrs. Armstrong's address. It's somewhere in Italy.

MISS JANUS : Yes. Peg del Mio Cuore. Rapallo.

MISS BUFTON : Oh. (*Then puzzled*) What did you say ?

MISS JANUS : Peg del Mio Cuore. Peg o' My Heart in Italian.

BREWER : Her husband called it that because her name's Elizabeth.

MISS BUFTON : You mean Margaret.

BREWER : No, Elizabeth.

MISS BUFTON : But Peg's short for Margaret.

BREWER : I know.

MISS BUFTON : Betty's short for Elizabeth.

BREWER : So's Liza.

MISS BUFTON (*puzzled*) : What do you mean ? You said he called it "Peg o' my Heart" because . . .

BREWER : Yes.

MISS BUFTON (*giving it up*) (*to Miss JANUS*) : How do you spell it ?

MISS JANUS : Peg. P.E.G. Del . . . D.E.L. . . .



Here, do you want an envelope done? I'll do it.

MISS BUFTON : Thanks ever so.

[MISS JANUS *goes back L.*

BREWER : Whatever's come over Miss Janus?

[PAT *turns.*

Two offers to do somebody else's work in five minutes.

MISS BUFTON : She's been sulking ever since tea-time. I expect she's trying to make up for it.

PAT : She's got a bad headache.

MISS BUFTON : Has she? She was as cheerful as anything when she got back from lunch.

PAT : It came on later.

MISS BUFTON : She was *hours* in Mr. Walker's room doing the filing, and when I went in she snapped my head off. I thought she'd been crying.

BREWER (*as though with a flash of understanding*) : Oh. (*Then, with a smile*) Oh!

[MISS HOOPER *comes out of typing room, carrying towel and an attaché case.*

BIRKINSHAW : You finished, miss? I suppose you wouldn't like to enter these for me? I'm in rather a . . .

BIRKINSHAW and BREWER (*together*) : Hurry to get off to-night!

MISS HOOPER : I've never known an evening when you weren't. Well, so am I!

[*Goes out R.*

MISS BUFTON : I think I'll try and get the six-ten, from Liverpool Street.

[*Exit L.*

BREWER : *Friday night's Amami night!*

[MISS WILLESSEN *appears R., she carries a long envelope, and appears somewhat out of breath.*

MISS WILLESSEN : Oh . . . oh, Mr. Brewer, I'm glad you haven't gone.

*[Puts hand to heart.]*

BREWER : Miss Willesden . . . is anything the matter ? You're not ill, are you ?

MISS WILLESSEN : No, no . . . oh, no . . . just a little out of breath, that's all. Those stairs . . . do you mind if I sit down a moment ?

BREWER : Of course.

*[He pulls telephone chair forward in front of table.]*

MISS WILLESSEN (*sitting and gasping a little*) : Thank you. I'm afraid I hurried rather . . . I wanted to catch you before you left. I suppose . . . I suppose Mr. Walker isn't back ?

BREWER : I'm afraid he's not. I don't think he'll be back to-night.

MISS WILLESSEN : No . . . no . . . so you said. I only wondered if perhaps . . . it doesn't matter . . .

*[MISS BUFTON crosses stage in hat and coat and goes out R., with whispered and gesticulated "Good-nights."]*

I've brought you my will. It's executed.

BREWER : Oh, really ?

MISS WILLESSEN : I'd like you to keep it for me . . . like the others. (*As BREWER takes envelope*) It's sealed . . . I'd like you to keep it sealed.

BREWER : I see . . . ?

MISS WILLESSEN : As a matter of fact, it's not the one you drew. It's a new one again. I made it myself on a form I bought at the post-office, but I think it's all right. I copied most of it from yours—only there was something a little . . .

private . . . so I made it myself. I hope it wasn't a serious breach of etiquette.

BREWER : Of course not.

MISS WILLESSEN : You mustn't be offended. Perhaps I'd better write to Mr. Walker to explain. . . . I shouldn't like him to think I was dissatisfied . . . or that I hadn't confidence . . .

BREWER : It's quite all right, Miss Willesden. But are you quite sure this is all in order ?

MISS WILLESSEN : Yes, oh, yes. I read the instructions most carefully. Two witnesses, not beneficiaries, both present at the same time. I got two waitresses in a tea-shop in Oxford Street. I gave them half-a-crown each. That doesn't make any difference, does it ?

BREWER : None at all.

MISS WILLESSEN : Oh, I'm so glad.

BREWER : I'll put it in my safe straight away for you.

MISS WILLESSEN : Thank you. And you'll destroy the other one ?

BREWER : I will.

MISS WILLESSEN (*rising*) : Thank you. I'll write to Mr. Walker this evening. I'm going back to Brighton now, but I'll write when I get home. I'm late for my train. (*Breathlessly*) I must hurry. You'll keep that for me. Good afternoon.

BREWER : Good afternoon.

[*She goes.*]

*During this scene, BIRKINSHAW has finished what he was doing, and has put on hat, coat, and muffler. He opens the typing door now.*

BIRKINSHAW (*speaking to Miss JANUS inside*) : I'm just off, miss.

MISS JANUS (*off*) : All right.

BIRKINSHAW : There's not much more to do.

MISS JANUS : I'll see to it. I'll be out in a minute.

BIRKINSHAW : Right you are. Good-night, miss.

MISS JANUS : Good-night.

BIRKINSHAW (*taking up a pile of stamped letters*) :  
Good-night, Mr. Brewer. Good-night, miss.

PAT : Good-night.

BREWER : Be a good boy. Don't over-excite yourself.

BIRKINSHAW : Wish I could.

[*Exit.*

BREWER (*moving to PAT, who is standing waiting for letters in press*) : Are you going to be long ?

PAT : No.

BREWER : Well, I'll just put this in my safe, and then I'll come down for you. Is that all right ?

PAT : I've got to change.

BREWER : Don't bother if we're only going to my flat.

PAT : Aren't we going out after ?

BREWER : Do you want to ?

PAT : I thought we were going to the theatre.

BREWER : Well, we'll see.

PAT : I must change if we are.

BREWER : You can go like that.

PAT : No. I'm all officey. It won't take me long.

BREWER : All right. Do you want to go to the theatre ?

[PAT *nods.*

(*Enigmatically*) : Well, change anyway.

[*Blows her a kiss and—goes out.*



PAT *takes letters out of press.*

HEC. *comes in. He carries his hat. PAT does not see him for a moment, and he stands looking at her. Then she turns and sees him with a start.*

PAT : Oh, you frightened me !

HEC. : I'm sorry.

PAT : What do you want ?

HEC. : Going home soon ?

PAT (*a little startled*) : Why ?

HEC. : Can I take you ?

[PAT *shakes her head.*

Why not ? Let's go to the pictures.

PAT : I can't.

HEC. : Why not ?

PAT : I'm doing something else.

HEC. (*disappointed*) : Oh.

PAT : I'm sorry.

HEC. : Are you ? Why can't you come ? Do ! I'll pay.

PAT : It isn't that.

HEC. : What is it, then ? What are you doing ?

PAT (*forced to it*) : I'm going out.

HEC. : With Dorice ?

PAT : No.

HEC. : Who then ? Not . . . What's-is-name ?

PAT : Yes.

HEC. : Oh . . . I see. (*Turns.*) Well . . . all right, then. (*Moves to go.*)

PAT (*sadly*) : Hec. !

HEC. (*turning*) : What ?

PAT : Don't go off like that. Let's go out tomorrow night.

HEC. : No, thanks. I'm doing something else.

PAT (*reproachfully*) : Hec.

HEC. : Good-night.

PAT : I've nearly done that story now. I'm sorry I've been so long . . .

HEC. : It doesn't matter. You needn't bother.

PAT : But I want to. I think it's awfully good.

HEC. : It isn't. It's all rot. You can tear it up.

PAT : Hec., don't ! What's the matter with you ?

HEC. : Nothing. Good-night. I hope you'll enjoy yourself.

MISS JANUS *comes in L.*

MISS JANUS (*to* HEC.) : Oh, hullo.

HEC. : Hullo, miss.

MISS JANUS (*to* PAT) : Are those letters ready ?

PAT : Here. They're not folded yet.

MISS JANUS : Give me the envelopes. I'll do 'em.

PAT : I will.

MISS JANUS : It's all right. I've got to stay. You want to get off, don't you ?

PAT : Well . . .

MISS JANUS : Push 'em over.

[PAT gives her the letters and a pile of envelopes. MISS JANUS sits down with them, folds, puts them into envelopes, enters and stamps them during the ensuing scenes. There is a difficult moment of silence. HEC. is still standing above the doorway R. PAT back of table. She looks from him to MISS JANUS and then, with a half-toss of her head, goes in L.]

HEC. *stares after her.* MISS JANUS *goes on working.*

PAT *returns carrying towel and suit-case. She crosses the stage and—goes out R., without looking at either of them.*

*Another pause.*

MISS JANUS : Are you waiting for something ?

HEC. : No. Good-night.

*[Puts on his hat and makes again to go. Gets just out of door and then comes back.]*

I say, miss . . .

MISS JANUS : What ?

HEC. : Can't you do anything with Pat ? It's driving me silly.

MISS JANUS : Well, why don't *you* do something, then ?

HEC. : What ? I asked her to come to the pictures to-night. She's going out with *him*.

MISS JANUS : I know.

HEC. : Well, what *can* I do ? I can't take her out like he does. I can't give her presents . . . evening cloaks. . . .

MISS JANUS : What do you mean ?

HEC. : That new one she's got. . . . I saw her go out in it the other night, with him. I was waiting outside . . . watching for 'em to go. I meant to follow them, only they got a taxi. . . . Well, that wasn't hers, I know. I'd been saving up to buy her one for her birthday in July. She said she wanted one. At least, it wasn't going to be a cloak . . . it was a shawl. Spanish . . . you know . . . with fringe and flowers on it. She saw it in a shop once when we were together. So I know she hasn't got a coat for evenings, 'cause she said so then. And when I saw this . . . well, then I knew.

MISS JANUS : What ?

HEC. : Well, that he'd given it her, I suppose.

MISS JANUS : He didn't give it her. It belongs to Miss Bufton. She's only borrowed it.

HEC. : Oh . . . oh, I never thought of that.

MISS JANUS : So you can give her the shawl, after all. Only I shouldn't wait for her birthday, if I were you.

HEC. (*thinking*) : No. No. No, but I can't afford it yet. I'm putting by for it, week by week.

MISS JANUS : How much is it ?

HEC. : Thirty bob. Of course, there are cheaper ones—but this is the one she liked. She didn't know the price. It's real.

MISS JANUS : And you haven't got thirty bob ?

HEC. : Well, I could find it, I suppose, out of my other savings. (*Very uncomfortable and unhappy*) You see, when I saw this the other night . . . her going out with him all poshed up like that . . . I just went home and took what I'd saved . . . for the shawl, I mean . . . and went out and blued it.

MISS JANUS : What on ?

HEC. : I took a girl out . . . what I met up West, in the Corner House . . . took her out to supper and the pictures. It wasn't any fun. I was too fed-up to be able to enjoy myself. I kept thinking of Pat, and what she was doing.

MISS JANUS : Yes.

HEC. : Still, I suppose I could break into my post-office account.

MISS JANUS : What's that for ?

HEC. : How d'you mean ? It's my savings.



MISS JANUS : What for ?

HEC. : The future. I don't know what for, exactly, but . . .

MISS JANUS : In case you ever want to get married ?

HEC. : Yes.

MISS JANUS : Do you think you will ?

HEC. : I expect so . . . one day.

MISS JANUS : Not yet ? You don't want to yet ?

HEC. : Fat lot of use my wanting.

MISS JANUS : But *do* you ?

HEC. : I don't know. No. (*Then, with sudden defiance*) *Yes !* Yes, I do.

MISS JANUS : To Pat ?

HEC. (*as before*) : Yes !

MISS JANUS : Well, that's an improvement ! Have you told her so ?

HEC. : Haven't had a chance.

MISS JANUS : She hasn't been out *every* night, has she ?

HEC. : No . . . no, but I've been bloody fed-up. . . . Oh, excuse me, miss. . . .

MISS JANUS : That's all right. Don't mind me.

HEC. : And I've been sort of . . . keeping away from her. Thought I'd chuck it, not see her any more. I know I'm a fool to let it worry me, but it does. I can't keep my mind on my work, or anything . . .

MISS JANUS (*with a smile*) : But you're not in love with her ?

HEC. : I don't know. P'raps I am. I feel all

soppy about her . . . can't stop thinking about her.

MISS JANUS : Well, tell her so.

HEC. : Fat lot she'd care !

MISS JANUS : I don't know. It's a thing women rather like to hear.

HEC. : She's gone on *him*.

MISS JANUS : I don't think she is, really.

HEC. : I'd like to knock his block off.

MISS JANUS : That wouldn't be such a bad idea, either.

HEC. : You *don't* think she's keen on him ?

MISS JANUS : No.

HEC. : It's just . . . his cash, and what he can give her ?

MISS JANUS : Not only that.

HEC. : What else ?

MISS JANUS : Well, he finds her attractive. He probably tells her so . . . anyway, lets her know it. She probably hasn't had very much of that before.

HEC. (*reflectively*) : No.

MISS JANUS : Has she ?

HEC. : No . . . I don't suppose she has.

MISS JANUS : Well, there you are, then.

HEC. : Yes, but what can *I* do ?

MISS JANUS : You know, you make me feel like a . . . well, never mind. I should have thought it was obvious what you could do.

HEC. : Tell her *I* find her attractive, do you mean ?

MISS JANUS : Yes.

HEC. : I couldn't.

MISS JANUS : Why not ?

HEC. : Pat and I aren't like that. Besides, what could I say ? (*Dramatically*) " I love you ! " Like they do in novels ? " The scent of your tresses maddens me " ?

MISS JANUS : I wasn't joking.

HEC. : Nor was I. At least . . . I *wouldn't* know how to tell her. As I say, we've never been like that. For instance, she'd probably think I was bats if I tried to kiss her.

MISS JANUS : Oh, I don't know. Do you want to kiss her ?

HEC. : Yes, I do . . . awfully.

MISS JANUS : Well, go on then. I don't think she'd mind.

HEC. : Yes, but when ? Where ? I can't go to her place . . . and there's such crowds of us at home. I never really see her at all. We haven't anywhere to go, except the pictures.

MISS JANUS : I *have* heard of it being done in the pictures.

HEC. : Yes, I know. *I'd* thought of that. But I want time to talk to her . . . properly about things . . . and if I'm going to think of marriage, I've got to save up, and work like stink. Oh, it couldn't be for donkey's years yet . . . I'm not earning enough . . . but I mean, I shouldn't have money to waste on the pictures.

MISS JANUS : Look here. I like you two kids. Let me do something for you.

HEC. : What ?

MISS JANUS : Give you an evening out . . . properly. Then you can talk to her and . . . everything.

HEC. : How d'you mean ?

MISS JANUS : Let me stand it you.

HEC. : No.

MISS JANUS : Yes . . . please let me. I'd like to. Wait a minute.

*[She goes into inner room and returns with her bag, opens it, takes out some notes.]*

Get her the shawl.

HEC. : I'll get that, anyway.

MISS JANUS : Well, take this then (*puts notes into an envelope*) and give her a chance to wear it . . .

HEC. : No, miss . . .

MISS JANUS (*growing slightly hysterical*) : Please . . . please do. Take her out to dinner and the theatre . . . or drive down to Richmond in a taxi. It's a good place. Anywhere, where there's lights and water . . . and if it comes off, put me down among the wedding presents as : "Miss Blanche Janus . . . opportunity."

HEC. (*taking it*) : I don't like . . .

MISS JANUS : Please . . .

*[She covers her face with her hand, on the edge of tears.]*

HEC. : Is anything the matter, miss ?

MISS JANUS : No. Take it and go, please.

HEC. (*putting it in his pocket*) : Well . . . it's jolly decent of you.

MISS JANUS : That's all right.

HEC. (*hovering*) : Well . . . good-night, miss. I don't know how I'll ever say it.



MISS JANUS : Good-night. You'd better go now. She'll be back in a minute.

HEC. : Right you are, miss. Good-night, and . . . thanks very much.

MISS JANUS : Good-night. Oh, half a jiff. Here, you wait downstairs. I'm going to talk to her.

[HEC. goes. MISS JANUS goes on with the letters. She cries a little. MISS HOOPER comes back. She has changed into semi-evening dress.

Hullo, I didn't know you were going out.

MISS HOOPER : I'm meeting Douglas at seven.

MISS JANUS : Any news ?

MISS HOOPER : He was seeing her to-day. Going to tell her about *me*. Ask her again.

MISS JANUS : And if she still won't ?

MISS HOOPER : Then I'm going to do what I wish I'd had the guts to do three years ago.

MISS JANUS : You haven't told him that ?

MISS HOOPER : I'm not quite a fool.

[MISS HOOPER goes through into inner room, leaving door open.

MISS JANUS : Is Pat still upstairs ?

MISS HOOPER : Yes. She's nearly ready.

[She comes to door, putting on hat and coat.

MISS JANUS (*quietly, pause*) : Irma . . . if he says she *will* divorce him . . . you won't go and be a fool, will you ?

MISS HOOPER : I wasn't born yesterday.

MISS JANUS : No, but you're keen on him.

MISS HOOPER : It may surprise you to learn, Blanche . . . it did me . . . that he's suddenly gone all *anxious* to marry me.

MISS JANUS : So there was some point in holding off—eh ?

MISS HOOPER : Quite a lot apparently. I seem to have played my cards right. (*With a moment of genuine emotion*) God, but I have hated it, though ! Well, this is the last time. So long.

MISS JANUS : Good luck.

MISS HOOPER : Thanks.

[*She goes. MISS JANUS sits with her face in her hands. PAT comes back. She is wearing a pretty, but very simple, and slightly pathetic evening frock.*]

PAT : I thought you'd gone. Don't sit there like that.

MISS JANUS (*removing her hands and smiling*) : It's all right.

PAT : I wish I could do something.

[*MISS JANUS smiles, and finishes off the post, locks cash-box, etc., and puts things away. PAT goes in L. and returns wearing an evening coat. MISS JANUS rises.*]

MISS JANUS : Pat.

PAT : What ?

MISS JANUS : Don't go out with him to-night. Do that for me.

PAT : I've promised.

MISS JANUS : Well, call it off. Will you ?

PAT : I can't. He's got everything prepared.

MISS JANUS : Don't worry about that.

PAT : But . . .

MISS JANUS : If *I* ask you . . . for your own sake ?

PAT (*after a pause*) : All right. I'll try.

MISS JANUS : And be nice to Hec. when you see him.

[*She goes in L.*

PAT : Did he talk to you just now ?

MISS JANUS (*off*) : Yes.

PAT : Is that why you want me not to go to-night ?

MISS JANUS (*off*) : Partly.

PAT : Well, I don't see why . . .

MISS JANUS (*appearing at door—putting on hat and coat*) : *I'm* asking you.

PAT : All right.

[*MISS JANUS comes out in hat and coat.*

MISS JANUS : Thanks. I don't think you'll be sorry. It's twenty-five past. Our lord won't be coming now, I should think. Good-night.

PAT : Good-night.

[*MISS JANUS looks at her—then moves to her and kisses her, and then goes. PAT stands at table alone.*

*BREWER comes in, carrying coat and hat.*

BREWER : Have I kept you waiting ?

PAT : No, I've only just come down.

BREWER : Well, we'll just give Miss Janus time to get clear.

[*Offers cigarette case.*

Have one ?

PAT : Thank you.

[*She takes one and he lights it for her.*]

BREWER : You *are* sweet.

PAT (*nervously*) : Mr. Brewer.

BREWER : What ? By the way, why not Eric ?  
It's after hours, even if we *are* still in the office.

PAT : I couldn't call you that.

BREWER : Why not ?

PAT : I couldn't.

BREWER (*sitting on table*) : Funny baby, aren't  
you ? Well, what is it ?

PAT : I can't come to-night.

BREWER : What ?

PAT : I can't come.

BREWER : Why not ?

PAT : I can't.

BREWER : What nonsense. Why, you're all  
dressed and everything. Of course you can  
come.

PAT : No, really.

BREWER (*beginning to get slightly angry*) : What  
are you talking about ?

PAT (*worried*) : I ought never to have come out  
with you at all.

BREWER : Who's been getting at you ? Miss  
Janus again ?

PAT : No.

BREWER : You're a bad liar, aren't you ? And  
because she's jealous you're going to throw me  
over, eh ?

PAT : She's not jealous. You've no right to say  
that. It isn't true !



BREWER (*mocking*) : No ?

PAT : No ! And it isn't true what you said this afternoon, either.

BREWER (*smiling*) : Are you sure of that ?

PAT : Yes !

BREWER (*with a smug smile*) : Well, *I'm* not. You heard what Miss Bufton said about her looking all peculiar this afternoon . . . ?

PAT : Yes, but that was because . . .

[*She checks herself.*]

BREWER : Because what ?

PAT : Nothing. She had a headache.

BREWER : That may have been what she told *you*. (*Smiles.*) Anyway, don't let's have any more nonsense about your not coming to-night.

PAT : I'm not coming. I promised.

BREWER : Who ? Anyway, you promised *me* first. Didn't you ? Didn't you ? (*Smiling*) Don't be silly, Pat, of course you're coming. Eh ?

[*He takes her in his arms.*]

PAT (*struggling*) : No . . .

BREWER : Yes !

[*He kisses her.*]

Yes . . . and yes . . . and yes !

[*He kisses her again, passionately this time. PAT tears herself out of his arms.*]

PAT : You beast to kiss me like that !

[*She wipes the back of her hand across her mouth.*]

How dare you ? How dare you ?

BREWER (*laughing*) : Why not ? Didn't you like it ? Pat !

[*He seizes her again.*]

PAT : No ! Leave me alone ! Let me go ! If you touch me again, I'll burn you.

[BREWER *laughs*.

I will.

[*He tries to kiss her again, she thrusts her cigarette at him.*

BREWER : Damn you !

PAT (*crying a little*) : I warned you.

BREWER : You've burned my shirt, damn you ! Do you know it cost me three pounds ?

PAT (*as before*) : Well, you shouldn't *wear* silk shirts !

BREWER : You little beast. Give me that cigarette.

PAT : No !

BREWER : Give it me.

[*He seizes her wrist.*

PAT : Don't . . . you're hurting !

BREWER (*twisting her wrist*) : Drop it then.

[*With a squeal of pain, she does so.*

There ! Now.

[*He tries to seize her again. She struggles, breaks from him, and he chases her, pinning her against the wall L.*

MR. WALKER (*who has appeared a moment ago at door R., wearing hat and coat and carrying bag and umbrella*) : What's all this about ?

[*Silence. BREWER releases PAT. She casts one terrified look at MR. WALKER and then bolts into the typists' room. BREWER stands dogged.*

What does this mean ?

BREWER : I'm very sorry, sir.

MR. WALKER : So this is what goes on after

office hours? (*Very sternly and angrily*) Really, Brewer. . . .

[HEC. *has also appeared, loitering in doorway.*  
MR. WALKER *sees him.*

Yes, what is it? What do you want?

[HEC. *looks helpless.*

What do you want?

HEC. (*stammering*) : I . . . I was waiting for Miss Milligan, sir.

MR. WALKER (*a faint smile twitching at the corner of his mouth*) : She's in there. (*To BREWER*) Has everyone else gone?

BREWER : Yes, sir.

MR. WALKER : I'll see you in the morning, get along now. The office is closed.

BREWER : Very good, sir.

[*He takes his hat and coat, and goes out.*

MR. WALKER *goes out. Pause.*

HEC. (*going to door*) : Pat.

PAT (*opening it*) : What do you want?

HEC. : Are you coming home?

[*She stares at him, dumbly, then turns without a word, and goes back into the typists' room, leaving the door open.*

HEC. *stands waiting. She reappears, wearing her hat and tweed coat, in place of the evening cloak, and carrying her attaché case. She is crying and trying not to show it.*

Pat.

PAT : Leave me alone !

[*She goes out R.*

HEC. *stares after her ; stands a moment, thinking, then with sudden resolution claps on his hat and goes after her.*

CURTAIN

## ACT III

### SCENE I

SCENE : *Mr. Walker's room. 9.30 next morning.*

AT RISE : *When the curtain rises, BIRKINSHAW is arranging the morning's post in a pile on the desk, and altering the calendar. He whistles as he does so. The door opens and MR. WALKER comes in.*

BIRKINSHAW : Good morning, sir.

WALKER : Good morning.

[BIRKINSHAW takes his hat, coat and umbrella and puts them in cupboard. MR. WALKER goes to desk and begins looking at and opening letters.]

Mr. Brewer here yet ?

BIRKINSHAW : Haven't seen him, sir.

WALKER : Ask him to see me as soon as he comes in.

BIRKINSHAW : Very good, sir. (*Pause.*) Excuse me, sir . . .

WALKER : Yes ?

BIRKINSHAW : I'd like to thank you for those tickets, sir.

WALKER : Tickets ?

BIRKINSHAW : Yes, sir. That concert last night, sir.

WALKER (*smiling*) : Oh . . . did you go ?

BIRKINSHAW : Yes, sir.

WALKER : Did you enjoy it ?

BIRKINSHAW : Yes, sir. Thank you very much, sir.

WALKER : Good.

BIRKINSHAW : Anything else, sir ?



WALKER (*handing him some letters, and ringing buzzer*) : Give those to Willis, and tell him I'd like to see that draft assignment he's working on.

BIRKINSHAW : Now, sir ?

WALKER : No, later. I'll ring for him. Tell him not to go out without seeing me.

BIRKINSHAW : Very good, sir.

[*He goes, passing Miss JANUS who comes in.*

WALKER (*pushing a document across table*) : I want three copies of that, Miss Janus, please.

[*She makes a note on it.*

You might get on with it at once. I'll give the letters to Miss Hooper. Is she here yet ?

MISS JANUS : Not yet, Mr. Walker.

WALKER : Well, ask her to come to me as soon as she arrives.

MISS JANUS : Yes, Mr. Walker.

[*Pause. He goes on reading letters.*

Mr. Walker.

WALKER : Yes ?

MISS JANUS : Could I speak to you a moment ?

WALKER : Certainly. What is it ?

MISS JANUS : I want to give in my notice.

WALKER : What's that ?

MISS JANUS : I'm sorry, Mr. Walker.

WALKER (*amazed*) : Miss Janus ! This is very surprising.

MISS JANUS : Yes, I know.

WALKER : Are you getting married or something ?

MISS JANUS (*impassive*) : No, Mr. Walker.

WALKER : Have you got another job ?

MISS JANUS : No, Mr. Walker.

WALKER : Well, what is it then ?

MISS JANUS : It's just that I want to leave.

WALKER : But, Miss Janus, you've been here ten years.

MISS JANUS : I know.

WALKER (*smiling*) : Why, I look on you as part of the firm almost.

MISS JANUS : I'm sorry.

WALKER : Is it a question of money ? Because, if so . . .

MISS JANUS : It isn't that.

WALKER : Well, what is it, then ? Aren't you happy here ? Don't you like the work any more ?

MISS JANUS : I don't know that I've ever really liked it, Mr. Walker. But it's just that I want to give it up, that's all. I'll stay on until you've got someone else, of course. I don't want to cause you any inconvenience.

WALKER (*after a brief pause*) : I suppose I've no alternative but to accept your notice, Miss Janus, but I think it's a little foolish of you. May I ask what it is that you intend doing ?

MISS JANUS : I don't quite know, Mr. Walker. I think I'm going abroad.

WALKER : Abroad ? To take a post of some sort ?

MISS JANUS : No. No, I don't think so.

WALKER : Sit down a moment, Miss Janus. (*She does so. Pause.*) You're perfectly free, of course, to do as you like in this matter, and I know that I've no right to ask you for your reasons. But you've been with the firm a very long time, and I don't like to see you doing something you may afterwards very seriously regret. I don't know anything about your private affairs, of course, but do they justify you in

throwing up a job like this and just . . . going abroad ?

MISS JANUS : I think so.

WALKER : And when you return ?

MISS JANUS : I don't know, Mr. Walker.

WALKER : You've no idea what you're going to do ?

MISS JANUS : No, Mr. Walker.

WALKER : Miss Janus, forgive me, but . . . aren't you being a little foolish ? Are you financially in a position to do this ?

MISS JANUS : For a time.

WALKER : Yes, but after that ?

MISS JANUS : I don't know.

WALKER (*after a pause*) : Miss Janus, I can't let you do this.

MISS JANUS : It's my affair, Mr. Walker.

WALKER : If you'd like to take a holiday . . . a proper holiday . . . three months say . . .

MISS JANUS : No, Mr. Walker.

WALKER : Well, as I say, I can't refuse to accept your notice, but that is how I shall regard it. You have been very useful to us here and if you care to return . . . within a reasonable time . . . say, anything up to six months . . . you will find your job still open for you.

MISS JANUS : That's very generous of you, Mr. Walker.

WALKER : Not at all.

MISS JANUS : I'm afraid I shall not be able to avail myself of your offer.

WALKER : Well, we'll see. Now get on with those copies. (*Rings buzzer.*)

MISS JANUS : Yes, Mr. Walker.

WALKER (*picking up another envelope*) : Oh, just a moment. . . . (*He becomes absorbed in the contents of the letter.*)

[MISS HOOPER *comes in*. He looks up, and then down at the letter. MISS HOOPER and MISS JANUS stand waiting. MISS HOOPER nudges MISS JANUS and indicates a ring upon her engagement finger. By dumb show between them MISS JANUS expresses mild, slightly listless, surprised approval and MISS HOOPER gratification. MR. WALKER looks up absent-mindedly.

Yes ?

MISS HOOPER : You rang for me, Mr. Walker.

WALKER : Oh, yes, I want to give you the letters. (*Pushing a paper across*) I want ten copies of that statement, Miss Janus. Have one sent to each of the beneficiaries under the trust.

MISS JANUS : Very good, Mr. Walker.

WALKER : That's all.

[MISS JANUS *goes*. BIRKINSHAW *comes in*.

Yes, what is it ?

BIRKINSHAW : Miss Willesden's housekeeper, sir, on the telephone. Trunk call from Brighton. Wants to speak to you particular.

WALKER : Oh, very well. Am I through ?

BIRKINSHAW : Yes, sir. (*He goes.*)

WALKER (*on 'phone, while MISS HOOPER stands waiting*) : Hullo . . . hullo, yes . . . speaking ! Yes. Oh dear, I'm sorry to hear that. Yes. Yes, of course. Yes, I think we have. Very well. I'll send someone down . . . probably to-morrow. That'll give you time. I'm very sorry. Good-bye. (*He puts down the receiver and rings buzzer.*) One moment, Miss Hooper.

[*Enter BIRKINSHAW.*

Is Mr. Brewer here yet ?

BIRKINSHAW : Just come, I think, sir.



WALKER : Ask him to come to me at once, will you ? (*As BIRKINSHAW makes to go*) Wait a minute, wait a minute. Don't be in such a hurry. Ask him to bring Miss Willesden's will down with him, will you ? I think it's in his safe.

BIRKINSHAW : Very good, sir.

[*Exit.*

WALKER : I'll have to do the letters later, Miss Hooper. I'll send for you. You've got something to go on with ?

MISS HOOPER : Oh, yes, Mr. Walker.

WALKER : All right.

[*MISS HOOPER goes.*

MR. WALKER *goes on opening and reading letters until BREWER comes. He carries a long envelope.*

Oh, good morning, Brewer. You're late.

BREWER : I'm sorry. You wanted Miss Willesden's will ?

WALKER : Is that it ?

BREWER : Yes. She brought it yesterday about six o'clock.

WALKER : Her housekeeper's just telephoned. They found her dead in bed this morning.

BREWER (*lightly*) : Good God !

WALKER : You'd better go down there to-morrow to see to things. (*Takes up envelope.*) Did you make this for her ?

BREWER : No, she did it herself on a post-office form . . . asked me to keep it sealed.

WALKER : I hope it's all right.

BREWER : Most of it's copied from one I drew for her, I believe. She came in yesterday specially

to sign it, and then took it away, and brought this back instead.

WALKER : Was she all right ?

BREWER : She didn't seem any madder than usual, if that's what you mean.

WALKER : H'm. Well, let's have a look at it. (*Opens will, and looks first at foot.*) The attestation's all right. (*Pause.*) Good gracious !

BREWER : What's she done ?

[*He tries to look. MR. WALKER folds the will to prevent his seeing.*]

WALKER : What was the will you prepared for her ?

BREWER : Mostly charities. Legacies to her servants and the residue to some home for retired virgins. I've got a carbon copy.

WALKER : Was that all ?

BREWER : I think so. Why ?

WALKER : Did she see anyone else besides you yesterday afternoon ?

BREWER : I really don't know. Yes, I think she was talking to Miss Milligan while she was waiting in here.

WALKER : Oh. How long for ?

BREWER : I don't know. About five minutes. Why, what's up ?

WALKER : Never mind now. (*Pause.*) Look here, Brewer, about last night. I don't know whether you've anything you want to say ?

BREWER : I don't think so.

WALKER : No. I don't think there's anything I need say, except that it can't go on. I'm very sorry, Brewer, but you'll have to go.

BREWER : Go ?

WALKER : I'm afraid so. I can't have that sort of thing in the office. I've talked to you about it before. I shall be sorry to lose you . . . you've been good at your work . . . but I'm afraid I've no alternative. I can't have you assaulting the typists like that.

BREWER (*after a pause*) : Very well.

WALKER : I've every right to dismiss you without notice. I don't want to do that . . . for your sake, so we'll take the three months clause in your agreement as being operative in this case. That'll take you till the first of August. Only . . . for the remainder of your time here, I don't want you to make use of the girls in any way. You'll give your dictation to Willis . . . I'll instruct him about that . . . or draft your letters in longhand if he's busy. And any copying you have you'll send down by Birkinshaw. (*Speaking firmly and distinctly*) I don't want you to use the general office for any purpose whatsoever. You will keep to your own room upstairs entirely. If I find you down here under any circumstances you go at once. You understand ?

BREWER (*very subdued*) : Yes.

WALKER : Very well. (*Rings buzzer.*) By the way, I suppose you're not in any way responsible for Miss Janus giving me notice this morning, are you ?

BREWER (*surprised*) : Miss Janus ?

WALKER : Yes. Do you know any reason why she wants to leave ?

BREWER : No, none at all. (*With a sudden thought*) Unless . . .

WALKER : Unless ?

BREWER : No. None at all. I can't imagine.

WALKER : I wonder.

[*He returns to his papers.*]

BREWER *smiles to himself*. PAT *comes in*. *She and BREWER avoid each other's eyes.*

That's all, Brewer.

[BREWER *goes*.

PAT : You rang, Mr. Walker ?

WALKER : Yes, sit down.

[*She does so.*

Did you see Miss Willesden here yesterday ?

PAT : Yes, Mr. Walker.

WALKER : Did you talk to her ?

PAT : Yes.

WALKER : What about ?

PAT : I don't know . . . (*Alarmed*) Oh, she hasn't said anything, has she ? She promised she wouldn't.

WALKER : What about ?

PAT : About me. Oh, Mr. Walker, I wasn't complaining . . . honestly, I wasn't. She promised she wouldn't say a word.

WALKER : Miss Milligan, what are you talking about ? What did she promise she wouldn't say a word about ?

PAT : She was asking me questions about myself, and she wanted to know how much money I got . . . here, I mean. I tried not to tell her, honestly I did, Mr. Walker, but she kept on and on, and at last I had to. And she said she thought it wasn't enough and that she was going to speak to you about it. I told her she mustn't, and that it would look as if I'd been complaining. . . .

WALKER : Was that all ?

PAT : Yes.

WALKER : I see.

PAT : She hasn't written to you about it ? She



said last night when she came back that she was going to write to you, but that was about her will.

WALKER : Do you know anything about that ?

PAT : No, except that she didn't sign the one Miss Bufton typed. She made one on a form, I heard her say.

WALKER : And that's all you know ?

PAT : Yes, Mr. Walker.

WALKER : She didn't tell you what she was going to do with her will ?

PAT : Oh, no, Mr. Walker.

WALKER : Miss Milligan, Miss Willesden died at her home in Brighton last night.

PAT : Oh . . . !

WALKER : And in that will she made yesterday afternoon she left you a hundred and fifty pounds a year.

PAT (*shocked*) : No . . . oh, no !

WALKER (*opening will*) : Listen. " I desire that an annuity of £150 per annum be bought and paid quarterly to Miss Patricia Milligan, typist to Messrs. Walker, Windermere, Solicitors, of 370A, London Wall, that she may have less reason to fear old age."

PAT (*crying*) : I can't take it.

WALKER : Why not ?

PAT : No . . . she'd no reason to leave it me. I feel as if I'd asked for it.

WALKER : I don't think you need feel that.

PAT (*still crying*) : It's dreadful.

WALKER : All the rest of her money goes to charity. You needn't feel you're robbing anyone.

PAT : But I didn't know her. I'd only spoken to her once before.

WALKER : I must admit that I don't care very much for the idea of my staff receiving legacies from clients, but Miss Willesden was rather an exceptional case. And I'd rather you didn't discuss your private affairs with the clients . . . but there again, I'll admit the circumstances were unusual. Miss Willesden was a little peculiar.

PAT : I know.

WALKER (*smiling*) : Well, don't let it occur again, Miss Milligan, that's all. And I congratulate you. You'd better go back to your work.

PAT (*rising*) : Mr. Walker.

WALKER : What is it ?

PAT : I'd like to give in my notice.

WALKER (*sharply*) : What ? Is this an epidemic ?

PAT : If you please.

WALKER : Why ? Because you've come into money ?

PAT : No . . . oh, no !

WALKER : Why, then ?

PAT : Because of last night.

WALKER : Oh yes . . . last night. I'd forgotten about that. Sit down again, Miss Milligan. (*She does so.*) Tell me about last night.

PAT : I can't.

WALKER : When I came in, Mr. Brewer appeared to be . . . assaulting you. Was that the case ?

PAT : It was my own fault.

WALKER : Oh ?

PAT : For going out with him in the first place. I knew I oughtn't.

WALKER : You've been going out with Mr. Brewer ?

PAT : Yes.

WALKER : I see. Miss Milligan, I'm not going to ask you any more questions, but I want to talk to you. You're very young, and you haven't been here very long, but there's one thing you've got to understand. The only way to run an office is for every member to make himself . . . or herself . . . as nearly as possible an automaton, or a machine. That's a hard thing to say, but I'm afraid it's true. You can't bring personalities and personal relationships into business.

PAT (*whispering*) : I know.

WALKER : You're here to work. You can't *do* your work if you mix other things up with it. That's why it was wrong of you to go out with Mr. Brewer . . . (*with a smile*) quite apart from any other reasons. Outside the office, have as good a time as you like or can, but in the office . . . work. And when you've done your work . . . go home.

PAT (*tearful*) : I'm sorry.

WALKER : Yes, well, don't cry about it. (*Smiling*) That's another thing you mustn't do in the office. (*Serious again*) I don't want you to think I don't sympathise. I know office work's no fun. I don't always enjoy it myself. There are lots of things *I'd* rather be doing, and thinking about, but they can't intrude here. You know, my old father always used to warn me that it wasn't going to be possible having women in the office . . . he retired the day we engaged our first woman typist. "Work's work," he always used to say, "but with women about it never can be." I'm afraid he was rather right, but it's a thing we can't go back on now. So it's up to you to minimise it, do you see? (PAT *nods*.) Very well. Now I don't want to accept your notice. I can promise you you'll have no more trouble with Mr. Brewer, if you'll behave yourself—and there'll probably be quite a lot more work for

you in the near future. What did I tell you about crying in the office ? Go along now.

[*Rings buzzer.*

PAT (*rising*) : Thank you, Mr. Walker. (*She goes.*)

[*Miss HOOPER comes in.*

WALKER : Now, Miss Hooper, we can get down to the letters at last. Oh, by the way, you're a friend of Miss Janus, aren't you ? Did *you* know she was going to give me notice this morning ?

Miss HOOPER (*staggered*) : No, Mr. Walker !

WALKER : Have you any idea why ?

Miss HOOPER : No, Mr. Walker, I haven't.

WALKER : Oh. All right. Dear Sir, In re Margetson. Your reference : KLM downward stroke Z. We are in receipt of your letter . . . Oh, just one moment. I want to say a word to Mr. Windermere before he goes out.

[*Exit.*

Miss HOOPER *sits alone.* Miss JANUS *comes in, goes to filing cabinet for some papers.*

Miss HOOPER : I say, Blanche.

Miss JANUS : What ?

Miss HOOPER : What's this about your giving notice ?

Miss JANUS : Who told you ?

Miss HOOPER : Our lord.

Miss JANUS : Well ?

Miss HOOPER (*eagerly*) : What's happened ? Have you pulled it off, too ? (*Laughing*) Are we . . . sisters of the ring ?

Miss JANUS : Oh, shut up, can't you ?

[*She goes out swiftly, with a paper.* Miss HOOPER *stares after her in amazement.*

CURTAIN



SCENE II

SCENE : *The general office. About 3.30 the same afternoon.*

*When the curtain rises, BIRKINSHAW is at the table, reading something with fierce and gloating interest. MISS BUFTON comes in R.*

BIRKINSHAW : I saw, miss . . . 'ave a look at this.

MISS BUFTON : What is it ?

BIRKINSHAW : Letters in that divorce case . . . Maverick *v.* Maverick. I've been trying to get hold of them for weeks.

MISS BUFTON : Where did you get them ?

BIRKINSHAW : Took 'em off Willis' table just now while 'e was in with Mr. Walker. 'E's been copying them.

MISS BUFTON : I know. Are they *awful* ?

BIRKINSHAW : Lovely and rude !

MISS BUFTON : I *oughtn't* to look at them. Mr. Walker wouldn't like it . . .

BIRKINSHAW : Just look at this bit.

MISS BUFTON (*looking*) : Oh, I say ! Really ! Oh, I say !

*[She sits down and goes on reading, avidly. BIRKINSHAW leans over her shoulder.]*

BIRKINSHAW : Wait a minute . . . I'll show you the best bit. (*He does.*)

*[MISS HOOPER comes in.]*

MISS HOOPER : What have you got there ?

MISS BUFTON : The Maverick letters . . . they're *terrible*.

MISS HOOPER : Let's see. (*She joins the group.*) My giddy aunt ! Turn over.

MISS BUFTON : Oh, I say !

*[PAT comes in.]*

PAT : What are you reading ?

MISS HOOPER : Nothing for little girls.

PAT : What is it ? Let me see.

MISS HOOPER : No, you're too young.

PAT : Don't be silly. What is it ?

MISS BUFTON : Love-letters. From that man to Mrs. Maverick.

BIRKINSHAW : There's some from 'er to 'im.

MISS BUFTON : Oh, do let's see. Do you remember the day she came up here . . . in that sable coat, and *smothered* in diamonds . . . ?

BIRKINSHAW : *And* what a niff ! Coo-blow ! 'Ad to fumigate the place after 'er, we did. Look : 'ere we are. " Lovey boy." That's 'ow she begins. " It is three o'clock, and you have just left me . . . "

PAT : Don't !

BIRKINSHAW : What d'you mean ?

PAT : Don't read them . . . it's horrible.

BIRKINSHAW (*blandly*) : Why ?

PAT : It is.

BIRKINSHAW : All in the day's work.

PAT : They weren't meant to be read . . . like that. Bufton, how *can* you . . . sit there reading them like that. Suppose they were *your* letters . . .

BIRKINSHAW (*guffaws*) : Huh !

[MISS BUFTON *puts them down rather uncomfortably.*

PAT : No, but suppose you'd written them . . . to someone you were in love with . . . would you like to think of them being read . . . like that ?

MISS BUFTON (*faintly*) : No . . . no. Still, they're

only copies. It isn't as if they were on note-paper !

*[The group breaks up.]*

BIRKINSHAW : What d'yer think of old Willesden Green kicking the bucket like that ? Thought she was going to chuck a fit 'ere in the office last night, 's a matter of fact.

MISS HOOPER : I bet she had a tidy bit of money put away. I expect she kept it in a stocking under her bed.

PAT (*suddenly*) : How *can* you talk like that ?

*[Almost in tears, she goes in hurriedly L.]*

MISS HOOPER : What the hell's the matter with her ?

MISS BUFTON : I don't think she liked Birkinshaw talking about Miss Willesden like that. After all, she only died this morning. You know it made *me* feel quite funny, thinking it was only yesterday I'd been typing her will.

MISS HOOPER : Home for Indignant Spinsters or something, wasn't it ?

MISS BUFTON : Yes . . . at Peacehaven !

MISS HOOPER : What waste.

*[The telephone signal clicks.]*

MISS BUFTON (*to BIRKINSHAW*) : There's Mr. Brewer ringing for you.

BIRKINSHAW : 'E's been doing that all day. Sending for me to bring letters down to copy.

*[Goes to 'phone.]*

MISS BUFTON : He hasn't dictated one. Written them all out in longhand. I can't think why. And his writing's so difficult to read.

BIRKINSHAW (*on 'phone*) : Hullo. Yes. What for ? Oh, all right ! (*Puts down receiver.*) Come and

fetch something down for copying. Why the 'ell can't 'e *bring* it?

[*Exit.*

MISS HOOPER : I don't know what's come over the place to-day. That kid (*indicating PAT within*) going all Christian on us ; little Eric sulking upstairs, and Blanche going about looking like a tart at a christening.

MISS BUFTON : What's the matter with her?

MISS HOOPER : Gawd knows. You know she's given notice?

MISS BUFTON : No? Why?

MISS HOOPER : Haven't the foggiest, unless he's chucked her.

MISS BUFTON : Who? Her boy, do you mean? I say!

MISS HOOPER : Haven't had a word out of her all day.

MISS BUFTON : Did you tell her *you* were engaged?

MISS HOOPER : Yes.

MISS BUFTON : What did she say?

MISS HOOPER : Nothing.

MISS BUFTON : Didn't she think your ring was lovely?

MISS HOOPER : She hardly looked at it.

MISS BUFTON : I think it's beautiful. Such good taste. And so quiet, too.

MISS HOOPER : Deathly!

MISS BUFTON : Are you going to be married in church?

MISS HOOPER : I don't expect so.

MISS BUFTON : Oh! Oh, but don't you *want*



a proper wedding ? I do. I want confetti and everything.

MISS HOOPER : It's not that kind of a marriage.

MISS BUFTON : What do you mean ?

MISS HOOPER (*pulling herself together*) : He's been married before.

MISS BUFTON : Oh ! Oh, I say ! Yes, I see what you mean. It does seem to make a difference, somehow. It's as if the bloom had gone off it !

MISS HOOPER : Thanks !

[BIRKINSHAW returns with document and an evening paper. PAT comes out of typing room and goes to cupboard at back for paper.]

BIRKINSHAW (*to* MISS HOOPER) : 'Ere you are, miss. Three copies for Mr. Brewer.

MISS HOOPER : Have you been out ?

BIRKINSHAW : No. Why ?

MISS HOOPER : Where d'you get the paper ?

BIRKINSHAW : Upstairs. Mr. Brewer's. Wanted to see what won the two-thirty.

MISS HOOPER : Have you been betting again ?

BIRKINSHAW : Lift man gave me a tip this morning, miss. (*He picks up the paper and looks at the front page. Reading from the paper*) "Lost bridegroom doped ? His mother's story. Went to see his fiancée and remembers no more" . . . "Married in person" . . . oh, no, in prison. "Ceremony performed in jail."

[*Turns to next page. MISS HOOPER is looking at the front page, which he is holding up.*]

MISS HOOPER : Another air smash. (*She reads. Pause.*) Here, wait a minute.

BIRKINSHAW : What's up ?

MISS HOOPER (*reading*) : " Another air disaster. Foreign plane comes down in Channel. Dutch diplomats on board." (*With alarm in her voice*) Wait a minute. (*She snatches the paper from BIRKINSHAW.*) Good God !

MISS BUFTON : What is it ?

MISS HOOPER (*reading from paper*) : " Jacob van Hoff, Hermann Schelding and their secretary, Capt. Jan Kellendonck." That's Blanche's boy.

MISS BUFTON : Not . . . killed ?

MISS HOOPER (*nods*) : Oh, poor Blanche !

[PAT *listens, white faced.*

MISS BUFTON : When ?

MISS HOOPER : This morning.

BIRKINSHAW : On 'is way to The 'ague. 'An past six this morning. Sunk in the Channel.

[A faint moan from PAT.

MISS BUFTON : Oh, poor thing !

MISS HOOPER : So that's why . . . They must have telephoned her at home before she left.

MISS BUFTON : Fancy her coming !

MISS HOOPER : Oh, poor Blanche . . . no wonder she's been like that all day. Oh, poor Blanche.

MISS BUFTON : But, I mean, fancy her coming to work, and giving notice and everything.

MISS HOOPER : And I asked her if . . . (*She shudders.*)

BIRKINSHAW : 'Ere she is.

MISS HOOPER : Put that away. Quick !

[BIRKINSHAW *conceals paper in waste-paper basket as MISS JANUS comes in. There is an embarrassed tableau.*

MISS JANUS : What are you all standing like that for ? (*Silence.*) What's the matter ?

MISS BUFTON (*touching her sleeve*) : I'm so sorry.

[*She goes in L.*

MISS JANUS (*bewildered*) : What's that mean ?

MISS HOOPER : Blanche . . .

[*She tries to speak, breaks into tears and follows MISS BUFTON in L.*

MISS JANUS : What's all this about ? (*Telephone clicks.*) That's Mr. Walker. He wants you. He's just going out.

BIRKINSHAW (*with a look that conveys a vast desire to express himself, and a great reluctance to leave*) : Yes, miss.

[*He goes.*

PAT *steals forward.*

MISS JANUS : Well, what's up ?

PAT : Blanche . . . then you *haven't* heard . . . ?

MISS JANUS : Heard what ? What's all the mystery ?

PAT : Blanche . . . dear . . . it's bad news.

MISS JANUS : For me ?

PAT : Yes.

MISS JANUS : What ?

PAT (*whispering*) : He's dead.

MISS JANUS : Who ?

PAT : Your . . . your friend.

MISS JANUS : Jan ? (PAT *nods.*) How do you know ?

PAT : It's in the paper. There's been an accident.

MISS JANUS : Crashed ?

PAT : Yes . . . this morning.

MISS JANUS (*white and rigid, looking for paper*) :  
Where is it? Where's the paper?

PAT : No, don't. Don't read it . . . now.

MISS JANUS : You're sure?

PAT : Yes. On his way to Holland, it said.

MISS JANUS (*seeing paper in basket*) : Is this it?  
Let me see.

PAT : No . . . please, Blanche, don't . . . not  
now.

MISS JANUS : Why not?

PAT : It's horrible. (Miss JANUS *sits down*.) They  
all think you knew . . . that that's why you've  
been looking so unhappy . . . why you gave  
notice. I didn't tell them. (Miss JANUS *takes her  
hand*.) Blanche dear!

MISS JANUS (*dry-eyed, hard*) : I wish I could feel  
something. I can't. He's dead and . . . it doesn't  
matter. I've always been afraid of his flying  
. . . doing himself in . . . and now . . . (*Pause*.)  
I got his letter last night. I put it on the fire,  
with all the rest of them. If yesterday hadn't  
happened, I'd be crying now . . . for him. But  
I can't. It's like the White Queen . . . I've done  
all my crying already . . . years ago, for him  
. . . yesterday, for myself. If yesterday hadn't  
happened, I'd have been thinking now that  
we'd have got married, that I'd lost my fiancé.  
Now . . . that's what *they* think. Well, that's one  
good thing.

PAT : You're leaving here?

MISS JANUS : Yes.

PAT : What are you going to do?

MISS JANUS : Going abroad. I've always wanted  
to travel . . . if I don't do it soon I never shall.  
I want to see different places . . . new places



. . . France, and Italy, and Greece . . . I'm sick of the tube and buses and . . . London Wall, every day. I've been saving for my trousseau for years. That'll last for a bit.

PAT : But afterwards ?

MISS JANUS : I don't know . . . and I don't care. I can always work . . . so long as it's not in an office. I'm not afraid. And if I go up the spout, I go up the spout . . . so long as it's a *new* spout ! Anyway, I'm going to get away, and I daresay it's the best thing that's happened to me yet.

[*Buzzer.*]

PAT : That's me. (*She goes.*)

[*MISS JANUS remains alone, staring before her. Then she remembers the newspaper, takes it out of the basket, smooths it out and reads it. She lets it fall. Tears come into her eyes.*]

MISS JANUS (*shuddering*) : Oh God ! (*She covers her face, and then murmurs, her voice empty of everything except pity*) Poor . . . devil ! (*She rises and goes to the back, to turn up a letter-book.*)

[*PAT returns.*]

PAT : What's Capt. Huddleston's number ? Do you know ? I've got to telephone him quickly.

MISS JANUS : It's on the how-do-you-do.

[*PAT finds number on telephone memorandum gadget, and rings up.*]

PAT : Temple Bar 3484, please.

MISS JANUS : Did you see Hec. at lunch ?

PAT : No, he wasn't there. I was punctual to-day, too. He must have gone somewhere else on purpose. I don't think he wants to see me, any more. I was hateful to him last night. (*Into 'phone*) Hullo, is Capt. Huddleston there ? Walker, Windermere & Co. (*She holds on.*)

[*HEC. appears. He carries a parcel.*]

Hec. !

HEC. : Have you got a moment ?

PAT : I . . . (*Into 'phone*) Hullo. Is that Capt. Huddleston ? I'm speaking for Mr. Windermere. He asked me to find out from you the date of your contract with Ballingers Ltd. We haven't a copy. All right, I'll hold on. (*Does so.*)

HEC. : You busy ?

PAT : I am, rather.

HEC. : I'd like to speak to you.

PAT : What is it ?

HEC. : No, I'll wait till you're off the 'phone.

PAT : You weren't at lunch.

HEC. : No, I was . . . doing something.

PAT (*into 'phone*) : Hullo . . . yes . . . yes . . . April 14th, 1928. Thank you very much. (*Scribbling on block*) April 14th, 1928. Yes. Good-bye.

[*Rings off.*]

HEC. : I say, Pat.

PAT : Just a minute. I must take this in to Mr. Windermere. He's waiting for it.

[*She goes out.*]

MISS JANUS : How are you this morning ?

HEC. : Oh . . . all right, thanks.

MISS JANUS : What happened last night ?

HEC. : What ? Oh . . . nothing. She wouldn't speak to me when she left here. I followed her home, but . . . I can't go up to her room and she wouldn't come down. I hung about outside until . . . well . . . the landlady turned me away. Then I did a bit of walking and I did a bit of thinking, too.

MISS JANUS : Yes ?

HEC. : It was just like a book . . . where a chap suddenly sees . . . what a mess he's made of everything. I expect I've ruined my chance of happiness for ever . . .

MISS JANUS (*concealing a smile, indicates the parcel*) :  
Is that . . . ?

HEC. : Yes. Oh, and look here, miss, that money . . . I don't want it. It was jolly decent of you to give it me, but I know what I've got to do . . . if she'll look at me again . . . and I'd rather do it myself . . . see ? No offence, of course, but . . . (*Hands her back the envelope.*) Do you mind ?

MISS JANUS (*smiles ; takes it*) : Very well.

HEC. (*like SIDNEY CARTON*) : It's up to me, now !

[BIRKINSHAW comes flying in—opens typing door.]

BIRKINSHAW : Mr. Walker wants his letters . . . 'e's just going.

MISS HOOPER (*off*) : Already ?

BIRKINSHAW : Got an appointment.

MISS BUFTON (*off*) : Here you are.

[BIRKINSHAW goes in to fetch them.]

MISS JANUS : I'll give you mine.

[*She goes in after him.*]

PAT comes back.

HEC. : I say, Pat . . .

[*Telephone clicks.*]

PAT : Just a minute . . . that's Mr. Brewer. (*Answers it.*) Yes ? I don't know, Mr. Brewer. I'll ask. (*Calls into typing room*) Mr. Brewer wants to know if Mr. Walker's gone yet ?

BIRKINSHAW (*off*) : Just going. Can I 'ave your letters, miss ?

PAT : Just a minute. (*Into 'phone*) He's just going, Mr. Brewer. Do you want him ? Oh, all right. (*Rings off.*)

HEC. : Pat . . .

PAT : Wait a minute. (*She dashes into typing room.*)

[BIRKINSHAW comes out, carrying letter folders.  
(To BIRKINSHAW, as she passes) Wait a minute,  
I'll give you mine.

BIRKINSHAW : I'll come back for 'em. (*Exit L.*)

[MISS HOOPER comes out, hunts on table for rubber stamp, muttering : "Where is the blasted thing?" Stamps it across the base of a document and goes out L. HEC. stands waiting. PAT returns, carrying letter folder.

PAT : Can't you come back later ? We're all in a rush now.

HEC. : I can't get out again this afternoon.

PAT : Well, six o'clock, then. Wait for me downstairs. You mustn't come up here.

HEC. : I've got something for you.

PAT : Give it me then.

HEC. : No, now. Here. (*He hands parcel.*)

PAT : What is it ?

HEC. : Have a look.

[BIRKINSHAW returns, in a rush.

BIRKINSHAW : Your letters, miss ?

[PAT gives him folder. He goes to typing door.  
Anything more in there ? What about that power of attorney ?

MISS BUFTON (*off, plaintively*) : I'm doing it as fast as ever I can.

BIRKINSHAW (*into inner room*) : You, miss ?

MISS JANUS (*off*) : That's the lot.

[BIRKINSHAW dashes back across stage and out R.

PAT (*to HEC., during the above*) : I can't open it here.

HEC. : Go on.

PAT : No. What is it ?



HEC. : Something you want.

PAT : What ?

HEC. : Go on . . . look.

[PAT tears the corner of the paper.

PAT : What is it ? (*Tears more, and sees.*) Hec. !  
It's not that shawl ? Oh, Hec. . . . (*She rips the  
paper right open.*) Oh . . . it's lovely.

HEC. : Here, they've forgotten to take the ticket  
off. (*He pulls it off, himself.*)

PAT : Mind, you'll tear it. Oh, Hec., it's beau-  
tiful. When did you get it ?

HEC. : Lunch-time.

PAT (*overcome*) : Oh . . . oh . . . I can't look at it  
here. I'll put it away. (*She carries it in L.*)

[MISS JANUS comes out. HEC. goes up to back.  
BREWER comes in, rather furtively, R. He looks at  
Hec.—and then ignores him.

BREWER : Miss Janus . . .

MISS JANUS : Why, you're quite a stranger !

BREWER : I want to speak to you.

MISS JANUS : What is it ?

BREWER : I understand . . . you've given Mr.  
Walker notice.

MISS JANUS : Well ?

BREWER : Well . . . if it's got anything to do  
with our conversation yesterday . . .

MISS JANUS : Yesterday ?

BREWER : I thought you might care to know  
that I've decided to leave, myself . . . so . . . you  
won't be bothered by my presence for much  
longer.

MISS JANUS (*understanding*) : My God ! The nerve of it. I told you you'd believe it.

[PAT *returns, stands in doorway.*

WALKER (*calling*) : Miss Bufton ! Miss Bufton ! (*He appears. BREWER slinks upstage.*) Brewer ! What does this mean ? What are you doing here ? (*Silence.*) You know what I told you ? Very well. Miss Bufton !

[BREWER *goes out.*

MISS BUFTON *comes out of typing room. HEC. hastily gets Law List off shelf and busies himself with it.*

MISS BUFTON : Yes, Mr. Walker ?

WALKER : What about that power of attorney ?

MISS BUFTON : It's just done, Mr. Walker. I haven't examined it yet.

WALKER : Well do, then see it goes round by hand at once. I'm going now.

MISS BUFTON : Yes, Mr. Walker. (*She returns to typing room.*)

WALKER (*to HEC.*) : What are *you* doing here ?

HEC. : Oh . . . oh, I'm from Parkers downstairs, sir. I just wanted to know if I might look something up in your Law List.

WALKER : Oh. Oh, all right. I want you a minute, Miss Janus.

[*He goes out. Miss JANUS follows him.*

PAT : Hec., you must go. You mustn't come up here any more. Mr. Walker was talking to me this morning.

HEC. : About me ?

PAT : No, but . . . work's work. I'll see you to-night.

HEC. : Yes, but . . . there's something I want to say to you now.

PAT : Can't it wait ?

HEC. : It's waited too damned long already.

PAT : Well, what is it ?

HEC. : Did you like that shawl ?

*[Miss BUFTON comes out, carrying some documents. She looks on table for rubber stamp and stamps one of them.]*

MISS BUFTON : Oh ! Oh dear ! I've put it upside down. That means doing a new back sheet.

*[Miss HOOPER comes back.]*

Oh, Hooper, just examine this with me, will you ? It won't take a minute, and it's got to go by hand.

MISS HOOPER : Right you are. Here, I'll sit down. Will you read ?

MISS BUFTON : Yes.

*[Miss HOOPER sits at table. MISS BUFTON begins to read the power of attorney aloud from a draft, MISS HOOPER having the completed one. She reads in a gabbling, completely meaningless voice, merely to check typing errors.]*

Know all men by these Presents that I, Herbert William George Moggeridge of 37 Minerva Road, Hammersmith in the County of London, Provision Merchant, hereby appoint Frederick Arthur Moggeridge of The Limes, Salters Green Road, Beckenham in the County of Kent, gentleman, my Attorney in my name or on my behalf to do or execute all or any of the acts and things hereinafter mentioned that is to say One.

*[During this HEC. and PAT mouth silently at each other—she, trying to make him go and to convince him of the uselessness of his staying ; he in protest.]*

HEC. (*at last in desperation*) : I say, miss, *couldn't* you do that somewhere else ?

MISS BUFTON : Well, really !

MISS HOOPER : Well, I'm damned !

HEC. : I'm sorry, miss, but . . .

MISS HOOPER : Oh, all right, let's go inside. Lucky for you I'm in a good temper to-day, young man. Come on.

[*She and Miss BUFTON go into typing room, leaving door open.*]

MISS BUFTON (*off*) : Where did I get to ? Oh, yes. One, to demand, sue for, enforce payment of and receive and give receipts and discharges for all money, securities for money, debts, legacies, goods, chattels and personal estate . . .

[*The drone goes on, and then HEC. goes over and closes door.*]

PAT (*shocked*) : Really, Hec.

HEC. : I've *got* to talk to you.

PAT : What is it ?

HEC. : Well . . .

[*He makes an obvious change in what he was going to say.*]

I want you to come to dinner on Sunday over at my place . . . will you ?

PAT (*puzzled*) : Yes . . . of course . . . I'd like to.

HEC. (*trying again*) : And . . . we're going out to-night, see ?

PAT (*bewildered*) : Yes ?

HEC. (*plunging*) : Look here, Pat, I've been an awful fool, I know, but . . .

[*Miss JANUS comes in R.*]

Oh, Hell !



MISS JANUS : Don't mind me !

PAT : You'd better go, Hec. Tell me to-night . . . whatever it is.

MISS JANUS : I say, Pat, our lord's just given me that will to copy. Why didn't you tell me ? I'm so glad. (*Kisses her.*)

HEC. : What's that about ?

MISS JANUS : Haven't you told him ?

PAT : No, not yet.

HEC. : What is it ?

PAT : Never mind now.

HEC. : No, tell me.

MISS JANUS : Don't worry. *You're* all right.

[*She goes in L.*

PAT : Poor Blanche.

HEC. : What did she mean ?

PAT : No, don't ask me now.

HEC. : Look here, Pat. . . .

[*Buzzer.*

PAT : That's me. I must go.

HEC. : Pat.

PAT : I *must* go.

HEC. : Pat !

PAT : What ?

HEC. (*suddenly pleading*) : Give me a kiss . . . please !

PAT (*surprised*) : Hec. !

[*He seizes her and kisses her, a long kiss. The buzzer goes again. They jump apart.*

HEC. : Hell !

PAT : I must fly. Work's work.

*[She goes.]*

HEC. *stands alone, then returns to the Law List at back.*

BIRKINSHAW *returns and regards him.*

BIRKINSHAW : Can't your firm afford to buy a Law List of its own ?

*[HEC. makes a jovial, mock-menacing gesture with his arm at him. The telephone rings. BIRKINSHAW goes over to it.]*

*(Answering)* Hullo. Walker, Windermere. Who's speaking ? One moment, please. . . .

CURTAIN

# AUTUMN CROCUS

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21<sup>12</sup>/<sub>55</sub> 1096

22<sup>8</sup>/<sub>58</sub> 1361

24<sup>4</sup>/<sub>57</sub> 1550

25.5.57 1174F

26.10.57 1221366

26/66 1221366



C. L. Anthony

AUTUMN CROCUS

*A Play*  
*in Three Acts*

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*Autumn Crocus* was first produced at the Lyric Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.1, on the 6th April, 1931, with the following cast :

The Gentleman in gay braces	MR. FRANCIS LEDERER
The Lady in but- toned boots	MISS GERTRUDE GOULD
The Lady with the lost underclothes	MISS MURIEL AKED
The Lady in spec- tacles	MISS FAY COMPTON
The Lady with the Baedeker	MISS MARTITA HUNT
The Young Lady living in freedom	MISS JESSICA TANDY
The Young Gentle- man living in freedom	MR. JACK HAWKINS
The Reverend Gentleman	MR. GEORGE ZUCCO
The hot Lady	MISS MAY AGATE
The hot Gentle- man	MR. FREDERICK RANALOW
The Crocus Gath- erer	MISS DORIS DAVIS
The Maid	MISS JOAN FROST

The Play produced by BASIL DEAN

## CHARACTERS

THE GENTLEMAN in gay braces  
THE LADY in buttoned boots  
THE LADY with the lost underclothes  
THE LADY in pince-nez  
THE LADY with the Baedeker  
THE YOUNG LADY living in sin  
THE YOUNG GENTLEMAN living in sin  
THE REVEREND GENTLEMAN  
The HOT LADY  
The HOT GENTLEMAN  
The CROCUS GATHERER

## SCENES

### ACT I

The living-room of the Rote Hirsch. Morning.

### ACT II

SCENE 1: The same as Act I. Evening.  
SCENE 2: Two balconies. Late evening.  
SCENE 3: Before a shrine on the mountain. Early morning.

### ACT III

The same as Act I. Morning.

*The action of the play takes place within 24 hours in a quiet valley within easy motoring distance of Innsbruck.*



## ACT I

**SCENE :** *Although the living-room of the Rote Hirsch is obviously part of an old house, one's first impression on seeing it is of lightness and gaiety. The walls are colour-washed and have a dado stencilled with small realistic flowers. The stove has the brightest of tiles and the window curtains are of modern printed linen. The latter are to some extent hidden by the flowering plants and fantastically-shaped cactus that stand on the window-sills. Although the furniture is old, it is peasant-made, carved and painted, and has the everlasting youth of a fairy-tale. Here and there some of the original woodwork of the room is still to be seen, and there are a few dark carvings—noticeably a heavy hanging lamp over the dining-table. On the whole, the old and the new have married happily ; even the modern piano and the ancient harp which stand side by side have joined periods amicably. Sensitive newcomers to the inn are sometimes reminded of the illustrations to an old German story-book, loved in childhood, and, though memory steadfastly refuses to yield the name of the book, a sense of recaptured magic remains.*

*It is half-past twelve on a warm September morning, and the sun is streaming through the open windows and door. The long table is partially laid for luncheon, but as yet none of the guests has come in. The only occupant of the room is a man, who is seated at the small table at extreme right of stage. He is about thirty-five, a handsome, blond Austrian, with a well-shaped head and thick, rather curly hair. Though a little on the heavy side, he has an excellent figure which shows to advantage in the peasant costume he wears—leather shorts, white shirt and embroidered braces.*

*As the curtain rises the GENTLEMAN in gay braces is just putting paper into his typewriter. Having done so, he wishes to know the date, and removes a sheet from his tear-off calendar. He then types slowly, with intense pre-occupation. From the kitchen comes the sound of a woman's voice singing a German folksong.*

*The clock, which has a pleasant, authoritative chime, strikes the half-hour. The MAN at the typewriter consults his watch and gives the clock an approving nod. He then resumes his typing.*

*After a few moments a WOMAN of about thirty comes from the kitchen. She is dark and handsome, with a heavy knot of hair. She wears a thick stuff frock with the sleeves rolled up, a large navy-blue overall and stout buttoned boots. She brings a few additions for the luncheon-table.*

THE WOMAN (*busy at the table*) : Das essen wird spät sein ; Minna hat eben erst die Kartoffeln aufgestellt.

THE MAN : Ach, das macht nichts, es ist noch niemand da.

THE WOMAN : Sie werden alle in kurzer zeit hier sein und sie warten nicht gern.

THE MAN : Aber sie wissen ja, dass du wenig Hilfe hast. Kann ich dir vielleicht helfen ?

THE WOMAN : Nein, das ist nicht nötig. (*Collecting dead flowers from the vases on the table*) Lenchen soll ein paar Blumen holen, diese sind shon alle verwelkt. Das Auto ist noch nicht gekommen ?

THE MAN : Nein, es ist spät.

THE WOMAN : Obwohl jemand für uns darin ist? (*She goes towards the kitchen.*)

THE MAN : Ich glaube kaum. Bitte, rufe mich wenn du mich brauchst.

*[A LADY of about forty-five comes down the stairs. She is wearing a knitted wool coat and skirt and a shirt blouse. There is nothing definitely old-maidish about her, and yet one is instantly sure that she is not married. As she steps into the room, the German WOMAN greets her.]*

THE WOMAN : Grüss Gott, Fräulein.

*[This sudden introduction of the deity into the conversation rather embarrasses the English LADY, but she responds politely.]*

THE LADY : How do you do ?

[German WOMAN goes into kitchen.]

THE MAN (*rising and bowing*) : Good morning, Miss Mayne. I did not see you at breakfast. (*He speaks extremely good English. His accent is not at all guttural, but is mostly a matter of faulty inflection, which often gives a simple, almost child-like twist to his speech.*)

MISS MAYNE (*her manner is pleasantly vague*) : Er—no. They very kindly sent it up to me. I didn't sleep very well.

THE MAN : I am so sorry. Was not the bed comfortable ?

MISS MAYNE : Oh, yes, thank you, Herr Steiner. Most comfortable. Such lovely feather beds, both of them.

STEINER : Both ?

MISS MAYNE : How silly of me ! Of course, I don't mean there were two—at least there were, but not as beds. I mean it seems so very luxurious to sleep not only *on* a feather bed but with one on top of one.

STEINER : Ach, I see.

MISS MAYNE : When first we came to Germany I found them just a little difficult to manage—one's toes were apt to protrude. But one soon learns to cope with them. I can now arrange the feathers just where I want them—light on the chest, heavy on the back.

STEINER : So ?

MISS MAYNE : Yes, I always like a weight on my back, don't you ?

STEINER : I don't think so. But then I do not have a feather bed. I have a spring-mattress. We have plenty : generally our English guests prefer them.



MISS MAYNE : Yes, your little maid asked me last night, but I'd much rather have a feather bed. I should like to sleep between two of them in England, but I fear the maids would think it odd.

STEINER : That does not matter.

MISS MAYNE : Oh, but my brother and I have such valued maids. They've been with us over twenty years. I shouldn't like to distress them in any way, and feather beds—no, I don't think they'd like it. And at the vicarage—one has to be so careful—it might look rather—rather sybaritic.

STEINER (*not understanding at all, but anxious to be agreeable*) : Ach, yes.—Well, I am glad anyhow that it was not the bed that made you to sleep not well.

MISS MAYNE : Oh, quite the contrary. I was—I was disturbed.

STEINER : Was there a noise ? In the village ? Perhaps I could——

MISS MAYNE : Oh no. Please don't say anything to anyone. There wasn't a noise—at least, not exactly—I mean—I'd rather not discuss it—so difficult—I hardly like—— (*Changing the conversation*) I just came down to post a letter. Is there a pillar-box near ?

STEINER : A what box ?

MISS MAYNE : I mean, a post-office ?

STEINER : Ach, the post-office ! But we will give it to the driver of the auto—he will post it in Innsbruck and it go quicker. He is here any minute now.

MISS MAYNE : But it's only to Innsbruck. Perhaps he'd deliver it for me—to the Hotel Tyrol—that would save time.

STEINER : *Ja, ja*, I will tell him.



MISS MAYNE : You see, I very carelessly left some of my clothes behind at the hotel yesterday—very necessary clothes. Indeed, I hardly know how to manage without them. If they get the letter to-day, they can post them at once.

STEINER : But the post is slow. We will send the letter by the auto now, and we will ask the driver of the evening 'bus to bring the parcel. That is better than the post.

MISS MAYNE : Oh, that would be splendid. At least—I suppose one can trust the drivers ?

STEINER : Ach, yes. They are good fellows. Often have they done such kindnesses for our guests here. All ladies leave things in hotels. We have here six nightdresses without a home.

MISS MAYNE : Couldn't you send them on ?

STEINER : We have no address—but we keep them and hope that some day the ladies come back. Have you the letter ready ?

MISS MAYNE : Here it is.

STEINER : It is in German ?

MISS MAYNE : Oh no—but the manager spoke such good English.

STEINER : Yes—but he may be busy. It is better if we write in German. I do it for you. (*Sits and puts fresh sheet of paper in typewriter.*) Quick, for the 'bus is late already. (*Types beginning of letter.*) What was the number of your room ?

MISS MAYNE : Fifty-three.

STEINER (*typing*) : Fifty-three. And where did you leave the clothes ?

MISS MAYNE : In the chest of drawers.

STEINER (*typing and translating*) : *In der Schublade.*—And what were the clothes ?

MISS MAYNE : Oh, various—er—under-garments.

STEINER (*typing*) : *Damenwäsche*.—I think we must make a list—it is safer.

MISS MAYNE : Safer ?

STEINER : If you left them here they would be all right for ever, but in a big hotel—who can say ? Perhaps the young maid say, “ Here is a nice thing for me,” and they do not all come. So we will send a list to the manager.

MISS MAYNE : I see. Well, there was a night-dress——

STEINER : You left it under the pillow—all ladies leave the nightdress under the pillow. (*He types.*)

MISS MAYNE : Yes, I did ! How clever of you.

STEINER : Then, in the chest of drawers—— ?

MISS MAYNE : Four pairs of stockings——

STEINER (*typing*) : *Vier Paar Strumpfe*.

MISS MAYNE : A blue crepe de Chine dressing-jacket with lace trimming——

STEINER (*suitably impressed*) : *Eine blaue Frisier-jacke*. (*He types.*)

MISS MAYNE : Two vests——

STEINER (*typing*) : *Zwei Hemden*——

MISS MAYNE : And three pairs of—garments.

STEINER : *Drei Paar*—garments—now what is garments ? (*Thinks for a second.*) Garments—— (*Starts to look the word up in a small dictionary that lies on table, talking as he does so.*) Three pair garments—that is six garments——

MISS MAYNE : Oh no—not six—just three pairs——

STEINER : But that is six.

MISS MAYNE : No, not really—they’re just called pairs.

STEINER (*light dawning*) : Ach, I see ! (*With a twinkle in his eye he whispers*) Knickerbockers ! He gathers from MISS MAYNE's expression that he is right, and proceeds with his typing, very much amused.) *Drei Paar Damenhosen*. Any more ?

MISS MAYNE : Oh no—that's quite enough.

[STEINER finishes the letter and puts it into an envelope. As he does so, a motor-horn is heard in the distance. It is an unusually musical one, with two distinct notes, which it sounds "High, low, high."]

STEINER : There is the auto—we have just time to address the envelope. (*Addresses it by hand and closes it.*)

MISS MAYNE : Thank you so much. You think they'll really be back to-night ? (*He nods, smilingly.*) You've taken quite a load off my mind. It's so very inconvenient to be without one's stockings and things. (*Goes towards staircase.*)

STEINER : And the three pair garments—that is more awkward still ! (*Laughs teasingly and shakes his finger at her. His manner with her, and indeed with all his visitors, is one of complete familiarity, but he is so charming that no one ever takes offence. He has an intense desire to please, with an utter lack of self-consciousness—a rare combination which nearly always assures the owner's popularity. He is always thinking out small services for his guests, not so much because he is a clever innkeeper as because he has a kindly nature. He is thus an almost perfect host.*)

[A little embarrassed, but completely subjugated by STEINER's charm, MISS MAYNE goes upstairs. As she does so, the motor-horn is heard again and the sound of a heavy car drawing up outside. STEINER jumps up and goes to the letter-box, which hangs under the notice-board. From this he takes several letters and then runs out of the front door. A little MAID runs from the kitchen and stands at the open door, but a voice from the kitchen calls "Minna !"]



*almost immediately, and she hurries back. A moment and then——*

*Two LADIES enter. The taller is about forty, heavily built and with a plain but rather pleasant face. She is wearing tweeds which fit fairly well but are not at all smart. One knows at a glance that they are her spiritual clothes. A shrewd observer would say "Schoolmistress on a holiday" without a moment's hesitation. She is carrying a Baedeker.*

*The other LADY carries a small suitcase. It would be quite impossible to make a guess at her age. Her face is shadowed by a very unbecoming felt hat and she wears pince-nez. She also is in tweeds, but she does not so much wear them as is she enveloped by them. They are of a nondescript brown and a size too large. It is unlikely, however, that anyone would notice this. If one noticed the LADY at all, it would be as someone quiet, dowdy and unobtrusive. Nevertheless, it would be impossible after a little while not to be aware that she has a singularly pleasant voice.*

TALLER LADY (*surveying the inn*): It looks clean——

SMALLER LADY: Oh, Edith, look—there's a harp!

EDITH: H'm! Well, let's hope no one plays it. No separate tables, I see. How I hate feeding in herds.

SMALLER LADY: Well, I think it's rather sweet—and it's only for one night, anyhow.

EDITH: One night can seem like a year—last night certainly did. Not a wink till daylight—lying there watching the walls——

SMALLER LADY: I meant to, too, but somehow I dropped off.

EDITH: Yes, Fanny—and it seems so utterly unfair that I got bitten and you didn't.

FANNY: S'ssh! Someone's coming.

[STEINER *enters with two suitcases.*



EDITH : What are you doing with those ?

STEINER : I bring them in for you.

EDITH : Thank you—but we're not at all certain that we're staying. Kindly take them back to the 'bus.

STEINER (*putting suitcases down*) : The 'bus has gone.

EDITH : But we told the driver to wait for us.

STEINER : He is very sorry, but he is late already because he wait for you at three hotels and you do not stay. Now he must go on. But if you do not like it here, he come back in one hour and take you again to Innsbruck.

FANNY : But we don't want to go back to Innsbruck——

STEINER : Then you stay here. You will like it—I show you some rooms.

EDITH : Not yet, thank you. (*Forgetting that they have been talking in English, she brings out one of her few German phrases*) : Wie viel kostet es hier zu bleiben ?

STEINER (*smiling*) : Dreizehn schilling täglich.

EDITH (*to FANNY, after rapid calculations*) : That's under eight shillings a day.

FANNY (*she has a mouse-like accent*) : Sie haben kein bad hier ?

STEINER : Ja, wir haben zwölf.

EDITH : What !

STEINER : We have twelve.

EDITH : I don't think you understand. My friend said how many *Bader*—baths—have you, not how many beds.

STEINER : But I understand well. We have twelve baths.

EDITH : Why ?

STEINER : Why ? Why not ?

FANNY : I'm so sorry—you must think us rude—but we've not found many baths lately—and in such a small hotel——

STEINER : Ach, I see. But this is not only a hotel. Here you come to be cured—there are special salts in the water. We have here *Heilbäder*—health baths.

EDITH : H'm ! I see. Well, I suppose we can have them plain. I don't want any health baths.

STEINER : *Ja, Gewiss*—you shall have them quite unhealthy. I show you the rooms now ?

[EDITH'S gaze has become riveted to the stencilled pattern on the dado. She stalks it. When she gets close she puts out her hand and touches it, then gives a sigh of relief. STEINER looks at FANNY, his expression enquiring if her friend is quite right in the head.]

EDITH : I'm sorry—I—er—mistook something.

STEINER : You do not like our painting ?

EDITH : Very pretty, no doubt. But—rather unnecessarily spotty. One would have thought that artists in these parts would have had more tact.

STEINER : More tact ?

FANNY : You must please forgive us ; we've had rather a dreadful experience. Last night at Innsbruck we stayed at a very old hotel—very interesting and historical—lots of kings and people had slept there—but—well—not very clean, I'm afraid. Er—animals came out of the walls.

STEINER : Animals ?

FANNY : Well, not exactly—creatures.

EDITH : My friend is referring—quite unnecessarily, I think—to insects. (STEINER *sees daylight*.)

Ones that in England would never be met in any but the lowest quarters. I myself have never seen one before.

STEINER : Then how do you know it ?

FANNY : There you are, Edith, I told you so. I'm quite sure it was a ladybird.

EDITH : It had not a ladybird's habits. However, I prefer not to discuss it. (*To STEINER*) Will you give me your assurance that there is nothing of the kind in this inn ?

STEINER : Ach, certainly—unless it come with you.

EDITH (*indignant*) : Really !

FANNY : I don't think you need be afraid. We examined our clothes most carefully.

STEINER : That is good. If you bring one, it is nothing—it is all right. But if you bring two—perhaps it is not so all right.

EDITH : Please let us drop the subject. In England such a thing is quite unmentionable.

STEINER (*apologetic*) : I am so sorry—but you mention it first.

FANNY : I'm sure we shall be very comfortable here. I think this is a darling room. Do you play the harp ?

STEINER : Sometimes a little, in the evening.

EDITH : Fanny dear, do let's get things settled. I'm sure Herr—

STEINER : Steiner—Andreas Steiner.

EDITH : I'm sure Herr Steiner plays the harp delightfully, but we can neither eat nor sleep on it.

STEINER : I understand. One harp does not make heaven. (*Laughs delightedly at his little joke.*) I show you the rooms.

EDITH : Thank you. Oh, would it be possible for us to have a separate table ?

STEINER : One each ?

EDITH : No, no.

STEINER : Ach, I see. Yes, I make you a little one here. (*Shows them the one by the window.*)

EDITH : Thank you, that will be very nice. (*She goes towards the staircase and then turns back.*) Are the baths in the house ?

STEINER : Ach, no. They are here. (*Goes to door.*) This is not a very big house, and they are big baths. See, there, under the tree, that is the bath-house. Just the throw of a stone.

EDITH : Yes, very nice. Still, rather embarrassing to have to walk to one's bath in full view of the village.

STEINER : But no one looks—they are used to it.

EDITH : Would it be possible for me to have a bath before lunch ?

STEINER : Ach, *ja*, but you must be quick ; lunch is nearly ready.

EDITH : Thank you, I'll hurry. Does anyone have to do anything ?

STEINER : Do anything ?

EDITH : Light boilers or pump up water ?

STEINER : Ach, no. You just turn on the tap.—But I help you with pleasure.

EDITH : Oh no, thank you—quite unnecessary. I can manage perfectly—(*still determined not to commit herself*)—that is, of course, if the room is satisfactory.

STEINER : You would like a big quiet room at the back ?



FANNY (*eagerly*) : With a balcony ?

STEINER : Yes, a nice balcony. (*He picks up the two suitcases and leads the way to the stairs. FANNY, who has put down her suitcase during the conversation, is about to carry it again when STEINER stops her.*) Ach, no, please—I will come back for that.

[*With a shy murmur of thanks, FANNY sets her case down near the stairs and she and EDITH follow STEINER. As they reach the staircase, MISS MAYNE comes down. They let her pass and then continue upstairs. MISS MAYNE inspects FANNY'S suitcase with interest. While she is doing so a YOUNG MAN and a YOUNG WOMAN come in through the front door. They both look intelligent but eccentric. The MAN is wearing the local peasant costume and, as he is tall and thin, with a pair of particularly bony knees, it can hardly be said to become him. He carries a stick, a small haversack, two exercise-books and a weighty text-book. The GIRL is rather good-looking, with thick, cut hair—one cannot call it bobbed or shingled, as it is merely shorn off just to clear her shoulders. Her jumper shows a strong Slade influence, but her skirt, though of colourful, hand-woven material, is, surprisingly, well tailored. She also carries a stick and various books, including a sketch-book, but, in spite of their various impedimenta, one judges from their dusty shoes and untidy hair that she and her companion have had a fairly strenuous morning.*

THE GIRL : Phew ! I'm hot. I must have a drink. (*She goes to the kitchen door.*) Minna, ein Glass kaltes Wasser, bitte.

THE MAN : My dear Audrey, you'll get spots on your nose if you drink when you're hot. (*He sinks into the chair at the extreme right of luncheon-table, strewing his belongings round him.*)

AUDREY (*sitting on the front edge of the luncheon-table*) : That'll be your trouble—I can't see my own nose.

[MINNA brings a tray with a jug of water and two glasses.]

Danke schön. (MINNA returns to kitchen.) Have some, Alaric, you might as well ; you've got spots already.

[MISS MAYNE moves over to the letter-rack, but her ears are busier than her eyes.]

ALARIC : What a libel ! You know perfectly well that I got bitten by a mosquito last night. (Notices that MISS MAYNE is taking a considerable interest in his conversation, and raises his voice.) Last night about half-past twelve, and you know it.

AUDREY : I know you wakened half the hotel trying to swot some fictitious fly.

ALARIC (*pointedly*) : There was no need to waken some people. (To MISS MAYNE) If you're looking for letters, the post doesn't come till after lunch—if it comes at all.

[With a vague murmur of thanks, MISS MAYNE transfers her attention to the 'bus time-table which hangs near the letter-rack, but she can hardly be said to concentrate on it.]

(To AUDREY) Have you heard from your mother this week ?

AUDREY : Yesterday—didn't I tell you ? Addressed to Mrs. Alaric Craven, as usual.

ALARIC : Poor old darling, she's determined to whitewash us. Any news ?

AUDREY : Evelyn and Justin are going to be married.

ALARIC : Nonsense. Justin would never be so immoral. He has a very highly developed sense of responsibility.

AUDREY : So has Evelyn—towards herself. All she wants is a home, husband and children.

ALARIC : Don't malign the girl ; there may be some mistake.

AUDREY : Oh no, there isn't ; mother says they're formally engaged.

ALARIC : Is there such a thing ? I thought it went out with corsets.

AUDREY : It's the sort of disgusting thing Evelyn would be. I expect she'll have one of those indecent public weddings, too.

ALARIC : It's really very hard to believe she's your sister. You know, there is something rather fine about her. She has the rhythm of the utterly maternal woman.

AUDREY : Rubbish. She's just the ordinary predatory female.

ALARIC : All women are predatory.

AUDREY : I'm not.

ALARIC : Oh yes, you are—not only predatory, but possessive. Take the incident of the hair-brush——

AUDREY : Merely a question of personal fastidiousness.

ALARIC : Well, going further than the hair-brush—— (*He looks up and sees that MISS MAYNE is so fascinated by the conversation that she has given up even pretending to look at the 'bus time-table. She returns to it hurriedly on catching his eye.*) You know, if you're interested in 'buses I should advise you to consult the time-table outside the post-office. That one's obsolete ; they cut the service down in September.

MISS MAYNE : Oh, thank you. I rather thought of going over to Glieders this afternoon to do a little shopping—a few handkerchiefs——

ALARIC : Well, you'll find out all about the 'buses at the post-office. It's a very nice post-office.



AUDREY : They sell stamps and things there.

ALARIC : And you'll just have time to go before lunch.

MISS MAYNE (*rather lacking in enthusiasm*) : Shall I ?

ALARIC : Rather ! And you can book your seat on the 'bus—it's often very full.

MISS MAYNE : Really ? Well, perhaps I had better. Which way is it ?

ALARIC (*taking her firmly to the door*) : See the church ? Well, round the back of it and over the little bridge. Then go along by the mill-stream till you find a path on your left. That'll take you right there—you can't miss it.

MISS MAYNE : Can't I ? Do you know, it's the most extraordinary thing, but whenever people say " You can't miss it " to me, I somehow *do* miss it. Still, I suppose it'll be all right. Thank you so much. (*Drifts off.*)

[STEINER comes downstairs, waves gaily to AUDREY, and returns upstairs with FANNY's suitcase.]

AUDREY : You are a beast, Alaric—you've sent her right round the village.

ALARIC : Well, even that'll only take her five minutes. Anyhow, I felt it was time she went. If she looks at me any more in her playful way, I shall either scream or strip. Something'll have to be done about her. Last night she was within inches of death. Do you know, she opened and shut her door six times ? Every time I went back to my room——

AUDREY : You shouldn't have forgotten so many things.

ALARIC : Need we revert to the hairbrush ? Anyhow, if you like being spied on, I don't.



AUDREY : Oh, I'm with you every time. She makes me feel like a chorus-girl week-ending at Brighton. (*Wishing to inspect her sketch-book, she chooses this moment to put on her horn-rimmed spectacles. The effect can hardly be said to be chorus-girl-like.*)

ALARIC : Do you know, I was becoming positively furtive. That last time I went back I positively slunk—I mean slank.

AUDREY : You slank very noisily.

ALARIC : I know. I collided with the stuffed owl.—Look here, let's go and meet her brother and tell him to break the true facts of the case to her.

AUDREY : But we don't know where he is.

ALARIC : I do. He's just behind the church, reading an Edgar Wallace.

AUDREY : How do you know it's an Edgar Wallace?

ALARIC : Sure to be—vicars on holiday always read Edgar Wallace.

AUDREY : What an absurd generalisation.

ALARIC : Bet you twopence.

AUDREY : Right.

[EDITH, *carrying towel and sponge-bag and wearing a bathing-cap, a mackintosh and bedroom slippers, comes downstairs and scuttles through front door to the bath-house.*

ALARIC : Good Lord, what was that?

AUDREY : Some new guest.

ALARIC : Curious costume.

[STEINER *comes downstairs.*

AUDREY : Herr Steiner, what time's lunch?  
I'm ravenous.

STEINER : In ten minutes—I go hurry it. (*He goes into the kitchen.*)

ALARIC : Come on ; we've just time to intercept the vicar.

AUDREY : Well, I suppose if we must, we must—but I do hate acquainting vicars with the facts of life.

[*They go out, but leave their various belongings behind them. The stage is empty for a moment, and then FANNY, in a mauve dressing-gown, comes to the top of the stairs. Her hair is down, and she no longer wears her pince-nez. One is astonished to see that she looks very pretty. She also looks very young, and yet—one is not quite sure. She peers short-sightedly into the room and, on seeing that it is empty, ventures to the foot of the stairs.*]

FANNY (*calling softly*) : Herr Steiner ?

STEINER (*comes from kitchen, stirring a bowl of custard*) : Fräulein ? (*He looks at her and is genuinely puzzled.*) You stay here ?

FANNY : Why, yes.

STEINER : But I have not—ach, it is the little brown lady ! Forgive me, I am stupid—I did not know you. (*Smiling at her*) You see, I let a room to a grown lady and now—you are a little girl.

[*FANNY puts her hands to her hair, confused.*]

Ach, no, it is not just the hair. It is—I know—it is the spectacles.

FANNY : They do make a difference.

STEINER : All the difference. I could not have believed—— (*He realises that he is staring, and breaks off.*) But you called for me—there is something that you want ?

FANNY : Yes. I wonder if I might have a little hot water ?

STEINER : You do not take a bath, like the friend ?

FANNY : No, I shall have one to-night, before dinner. I want really to enjoy it. You see, we haven't had many baths lately.

STEINER : Why not ?

FANNY : Sometimes there weren't any—and when there were they were so terribly dear. The last one I had—in Munich—cost three marks. How much are they here ?

STEINER : Two Austrian shillings—that is one shilling and twopence of your money. But for children they are half price—you shall have one for one Austrian shilling.

FANNY : But when I put the spectacles on I shall grow up.

STEINER : But you cannot wear them in the bath, so—yes—you have it half price. (*He laughs gaily.*) And now I get you the hot water.

FANNY : Let me stir that for you while you go.

STEINER : That is kind. (*He gives her the bowl of custard and goes into kitchen.*)

[FANNY sits on the stairs and stirs the custard.  
STEINER comes back almost at once with a large jug of water.

Ach, now she is littler than ever !

FANNY (*standing up*) : What a nice big jug !

STEINER : It is very hot.

FANNY : That's lovely. And to-night I shall have a real bath with lots of bath-salts.

STEINER (*eagerly*) : Ach, *Heilbad*, with salts—I get it for you.

FANNY : No, not health-salts—just bath-salts—some I got in Paris—lilac.



STEINER : Lilac—to match the pretty dressing-gown. (FANNY, smiling, but a little confused, holds out her hand for the jug.) Let me take it up for you.

FANNY : Oh no, thank you ; I can manage quite well. (She exchanges the bowl of custard for the jug of water, looking down shyly when confronted by STEINER's smiling eyes. With a murmur of) Thank you—— (she goes upstairs.)

[STEINER stands looking after her. A child's voice is heard, singing a German folk-song—a small, formal air. A moment—and then a very self-possessed little girl of about eight runs through the front door. She wears the peasant costume and is carrying a basket of pinks, roses and other late summer flowers.

STEINER : Grüss Gott, Lenchen. (He brings himself back to his duties with a mental jerk and returns to the kitchen, stirring the custard.)

[Having given a perfunctory “Grüss Gott !” in response to STEINER's greeting, LENCHEN continues with her song. She puts down her flowers and fills the empty vases from the jug of water left by AUDREY. She then arranges the flowers, singing all the time. She is completely absorbed in her work, and amuses herself by fitting her actions to the time of her song, almost as if she were inventing a little ballet.

STEINER returns with plates, etc., for the table by the window. He lays it and, seeing LENCHEN's flowers, decides he must have some for it.

Lenchen, hier auf diesen Tisch müssen wir ein Paar Blumen setzen.

LENCHEN (enquiring which ones he would like) : Was für welche ?

STEINER (going over to look at them) : Zeig mal her. (He chooses some pinks and takes them over to the little table. LENCHEN's song is subdued to a hum. STEINER is dissatisfied with his efforts. Nein, die passen nicht. (Going to LENCHEN for more flowers) Diese sind besser. (He tries these on the small table, but is not satisfied) Nein, die passen auch nicht. (Thinks



*for a moment, and suddenly has an idea.*) Ach, ich weiss. Lenchen, pflücke ein Paar Herbstzeitlose auf der grossen Wiese. (*Delighted with his idea, he hurries her to the door.*) Schnell, schnell—verstanden ?

LENCHEN (*nodding*) : Ich komme sofort zurück. (*She hurries out, carrying her basket.*)

[STEINER goes to centre table and collects the tray with the glasses of water to take into the kitchen. Before he can do so, ALARIC and AUDREY come through the front door, accompanied by a middle-aged clergyman—a gentle but rather flustered soul, easily recognisable as MISS MAYNE's brother.]

MAYNE : But, my dear young people, surely you realise—— (*He sees STEINER and breaks off.*) Ah, good morning. Lunch nearly ready ?

STEINER : Very soon—I see how long. (*Hurries off to the kitchen.*)

MAYNE (*with a glance at the kitchen door*) : Do you think they can hear in there ?

AUDREY : It doesn't matter anyhow. Herr Steiner knows all about it.

MAYNE : I suppose he'd be bound to find out.

ALARIC : Oh, we told him when we first came.

MAYNE : You told a hotel proprietor that you were living together without being married ? But surely he protested—in a respectable house like this——

ALARIC : Oh no, he didn't. He said he supposed it was an English custom.

MAYNE : Good gracious ! I hope you undeceived him ?

AUDREY : Well, we told him that only the more intelligent classes were going in for it.

MAYNE : Disgraceful ! You've no right to give the poor ignorant man an entirely erroneous impression of your compatriots.

ALARIC : Oh, come, Mr. Mayne, there's nothing ignorant about Steiner—he's a most intelligent man. And I should think his opinion of our compatriots must be jolly well formed by this time.

AUDREY : To say nothing of our compatriotesses—judging by Herr Feldmann's story of the rich English widow who stayed here last year.

ALARIC : Yes, she seems to have made a dead set at him.

AUDREY : I wonder if she had any luck ?

ALARIC : So do I. I wish I'd been here at the time—most interesting to watch the reactions of a man of his type. Do you know, I've a good mind to ask him about it.

AUDREY : I shouldn't if I were you. He's the essence of chivalry.

MAYNE : Really, must we discuss the inn-keeper——

ALARIC : Sorry, Mr. Mayne, but, you know, Steiner's a most unusual man.

AUDREY : He's got the most charming mind.

MAYNE : I'm sure he has but if you seriously wish to discuss your case with me——

ALARIC : Of course we do. Let me see, where were we ?

MAYNE : I was about to try to make you realise the utter folly and wrong-headedness of your—er—liaison—but really, in the very limited time that remains before lunch——

ALARIC : Oh, my dear man, five minutes will suffice to get the matter quite clear—and, really, you mustn't talk about liaisons ; one must try to keep one's mind above the level of French farce.

AUDREY : Of course, your generation's always so flippant about sex. Look how you behave—rushing lightly into matrimony, peopling the world with unwanted children, thronging the divorce courts——

MAYNE : I have never thronged a divorce court——

ALARIC : Probably because you have never married—which is, in itself, a crime against the State. The duty of every healthy male is to find a suitable mate—one who, by bringing the necessary feminine attributes naturally omitted from his ego, will complete that ego, enabling it and its female counterpart to vibrate in plastic rhythm—united, yet individual—in dual unity with the harmonic cosmos.

MAYNE : Good gracious ! I'm afraid I don't know what any of that means.

ALARIC : Sorry. I was getting rather technical. In simpler language, the sooner one finds a suitable life-companion the better.

MAYNE : But if you think that——

ALARIC : I said find—you can't find things without looking for them. If Audrey and I continue to get on, we shall probably get married and stay married. But we must try each other out.

MAYNE : But surely a long engagement——

ALARIC : Being engaged isn't anything like being married. Besides, one hasn't the time.

AUDREY : One may have to make several such experiments before one settles down.

ALARIC : I, of course, am a little more experienced in such matters than Audrey——

AUDREY : Don't gloat, dear. I shall soon catch up.

ALARIC : —and I am of the opinion that we are rather well suited. But we are just at a most important psychological stage, and it is absolutely imperative that no one should confuse our reactions.

MAYNE : And is someone confusing them ?

ALARIC : Not intentionally, of course, but—we are in danger of becoming furtive.

MAYNE : I decline to believe a word of it. You insist on telling me, a comparative stranger, the most intimate details of your private life on a public road, under a boiling sun, in imminent danger of being run over by a motor 'bus. I should call your behaviour positively blatant.

ALARIC : Well, that's a great relief—but I only said we were *in danger* of becoming furtive, and that's where we want your help.

MAYNE : Perhaps a little later—after tea. The others will be coming in at any moment. I should hardly like my sister——

ALARIC : That's just the point—your sister——

AUDREY : We're afraid she has a curiosity complex——

ALARIC : She opens doors——

MAYNE : Whose doors ?

AUDREY : Oh, her own, of course.

ALARIC : But even that can be tactless——

AUDREY : When it's done frequently——

ALARIC : Six times——

MAYNE : Are you implying that my sister was spying on you ?



ALARIC : Well, she seemed to find the corridor very interesting every time I passed.

MAYNE : But really—even if you do—even if you are—well, I mean, is it necessary to walk up and down the corridor repeatedly ?

AUDREY : Alaric is so forgetful—last night it was his notebook, his hairbrush and his Kraft Ebbing.

MAYNE : Kraft what ?

ALARIC : Audrey and I are annotating Kraft Ebbing.

MAYNE : Very laudable, no doubt. But, to put it frankly, since you are so set on this regrettable—er—experiment—wouldn't it be better if you travelled as man and wife and—well—obviated the necessity of nocturnal wanderings ?

ALARIC : What an unmoral suggestion ! We couldn't think of deceiving people. We make a point of telling everyone the true facts of the case.

MAYNE : Yes, you seem to.

AUDREY : Besides, we shouldn't share a room if we were married. Alaric gargles.

ALARIC : Every right-minded person ought to gargle.

MAYNE : I gargle myself—frequently.

ALARIC : Splendid—I knew you had the right instincts. Now, all we ask of you is to explain to your dear, delightful sister that we are two conscientious young people conducting a serious experiment. There is nothing at all daring or exciting about us, and we wish to be left in perfect peace to study our reactions to each other. Hang it all, we've had enough trouble with our parents in England without being watched over here.

MAYNE : Naturally, your parents object ?

AUDREY : Our parents live in Letchworth, but their souls are purest Penge.

MAYNE : Well, I really don't know what to say——

ALARIC : Don't say anything—at least, not to us. Just trot off and explain to your sister.

MAYNE : But she's lived a very sheltered life—I hardly like——

AUDREY : But don't you see it's your duty, to her as well as us ? She's obviously got a very dangerous curiosity complex.

ALARIC : She might do anything——

AUDREY : Probably assault Herr Steiner——

MAYNE : What an outrageous suggestion !

ALARIC : Not at all. Do you know anything about psycho-analysis ?

MAYNE : Certainly not. •

ALARIC : Well, you ought to. You're in charge of the souls of your parishioners—you ought to know something about them.

AUDREY : You mustn't be narrow-minded, you know.

MAYNE : I'm generally considered to be rather broad-minded.

ALARIC : In what way ?

MAYNE : Well, I've always been in favour of Sunday games——

ALARIC : Splendid. Look here, would you like us to lend you a few books on psycho ? You'd find it a great help in the parish.

MAYNE : Well, I hardly feel like tackling anything heavy, but I have just finished my novel. (*He reveals the book he is carrying—an obvious Edgar Wallace.*)

ALARIC : Twopence, please, Audrey.

[AUDREY extracts two coppers from her haversack, which is lying on the floor by the luncheon-table. She slams the pennies on the table.

(*Pocketing the pennies*) Thanks.—Sorry, Mr. Mayne ; just a little private bet.

[AUDREY has taken her sketch-book from her haversack and, sitting on STEINER'S writing-table, is making a quick sketch of the VICAR.

We'll start you on something quite light. I've written a little book for beginners myself—it's called *A Remedy for Sex*.

MAYNE : Isn't that rather drastic ? You know, I feel I'm coping with this situation very badly—I ought to be lecturing you on your escapade——

ALARIC : What a lovely word ! I ask you, do we look like an escapade ?

MAYNE : Frankly, you don't. You don't look like anything I've ever met before—I mean, your case doesn't. I'm afraid I'm rather out of touch with modern thought.

ALARIC : We shall educate you in time.

MAYNE : Not before lunch, please. (*He turns to go upstairs.*)

AUDREY : Hi ! Wait a minute. I'm just finishing you.

MAYNE : Finishing me ?

AUDREY (*adding a few strokes to her sketch*) : There ! (*She holds it out for him to see.*)

MAYNE : I say, that's awfully good. Are you going in for art ?

AUDREY : I've gone. But nobody would take me seriously. I have an incurable habit of making things look like what they're meant to be.

MAYNE : Well, this is certainly very like me. (*Looks at sketch from various angles, becoming more and more pleased with it*) I wonder—might I——?

AUDREY (*snatching the sketch from him and signing it*) : There ! “The Vicar's Awakening”—with love from Audrey. (*She hands it to him.*) But on one condition—that you take your sister in hand at once.

MAYNE (*pleadingly*) : Not in this heat.

AUDREY : Be a man, Mr. Mayne ; get it over before lunch. You'll just have time to catch her on her way back from the village.

MAYNE : Well, perhaps I had better go and meet her—but I don't promise to say one word till it's cooler. (*He goes towards the door.*)

[ALARIC and AUDREY collect their various belongings and start on their way upstairs.]

ALARIC : Well, as long as you get it over by sundown——

AUDREY (*as a parting shot, from the stairs*) : No more ever-open door !

[MAYNE goes off, and AUDREY and ALARIC disappear round the bend of the stairs. As they do so, STEINER comes from the kitchen and goes to his writing-table. From the board on the wall which shows the numbers of the various bedrooms he chalks out Room 16. He is then about to type, but at that moment FANNY comes downstairs and he stops to watch her. She is wearing a white dress, simple and home-made but rather becoming. She does not see



STEINER, and starts to explore the room. She examines the stove, peeps into the bar and inspects the plants on the window-sills. Stooping to smell one, she pricks her nose on a cactus and gives a small gasp of astonishment. She then turns to cross the room, and sees STEINER.

FANNY : Oh, I didn't see you !

STEINER : But I see you. You look in all the corners—like a little cat in a new home. And when the cactus prick you—you spit at it.

FANNY (*indignantly*) : I didn't !

STEINER : Oh, not a real spit—just a pussy “tcht !” (*He goes over to her.*) You don't like them ?

FANNY : Not very much—they seem so unnatural.

STEINER : But they are very natural—very real. But they are selfish—they live a little secret life, quietly, inside—just to please themselves. They do not give like other plants.

FANNY : I think that's horrid. And they're so ugly—so grotesque——

STEINER : Maybe—but you get to know them. (*Picks up one of the cactus plants.*) Look—he is like a rabbit—and this with little knobs, he has had three children this year—and this—(*he suddenly bursts into laughter*)—this is like—— But I must not tell you—you will be angry.

FANNY : No, I shan't. Do tell me.

STEINER : See, it is short and broad and very spiky—I think it is like the friend who goes to take a bath.

FANNY (*feeling she ought to be indignant.*) : It isn't.

STEINER : Oh, but it is. (*He gives an absurd, staccato imitation of EDITH*) How much do you cost ? Can it not be less ? Is your house clean ?

Why have you a bath?—and then she go upstairs and punch the poor bed—so. I think she is a most prickly lady.

FANNY : I'm afraid she was rather rude—but we'd had such a dreadful night in Innsbruck. And then, you see, she has to do all the managing—I'm so silly about it ; perhaps that makes her manner a little——

STEINER : — a little prickly ? (*They both laugh.*) She takes care of you ?

FANNY : Oh yes—I'm very stupid, I'm afraid. I lose tickets and get into wrong trains. I should never dare to come abroad without her.

STEINER : I think if she was not there someone would always take care of you—but if she is good to you I will not call her any more like the cactus. (*He puts the plant down and they move away from the window.*)

FANNY : She's really very nice—and she likes our room so much. After all, we couldn't guess we were coming to such a charming hotel.

STEINER : You like it ?

FANNY : Why, it's lovely—so fresh and pretty, and yet it seems to have the charm of an old house. It is old, isn't it ?

STEINER : One hundred and fifty years. At first it was the home of rich people, but for nearly one hundred years it is hotel. Of course, it has been altered much. I built the rooms at the side and the bath-house.

FANNY : Have you been here long ?

STEINER : All my life—and my father was here and my grandfather. Always since it was hotel have we been here.

FANNY : How interesting. And you've got all sorts of family records ?

STEINER : Not very many—but there are records in the church. I take you to see it this afternoon if you would like.

FANNY : Thank you.

STEINER : It is very gay and lovely—all gold and shining. And there is a big clock above the altar, high in the blue ceiling, among the golden stars. The children call it “ God’s Clock ”—but it doesn’t go very well. And you must see the skeleton in the glass case——

FANNY : Oh, I shouldn’t like that.

STEINER : But he is most cheerful and bright—with fine clothes and rings on his fingers——

FANNY : You don’t mean it’s a real skeleton ?

STEINER : Oh yes, quite real. Always is he there since the church was built, nearly two hundred years ago—but no one know who he is. He is dressed in satin and lace, very fine. Only when you get close can you see his hands and face are just bones.

FANNY : What a horrible idea.

STEINER : You think so ? To me, it is good. When I see him on Sunday I say, “ How lucky I am to be alive,” and when I come from the church the sun seems brighter, the meadows so green, and the mountains more high—and yet God lets you climb them.

FANNY : Poor skeleton, no mountains for him.

STEINER : But he has a fine glass case. You must not let him make you sad ; perhaps he can fly to the mountain-tops now.

FANNY : Wouldn’t he look funny with wings ?

STEINER : Oh, but the wings would not be on the skeleton—he would be an angel with a nice white nightdress.

FANNY : I wonder if we ever will fly.

STEINER : But we do—I have flown.

FANNY : Oh, not just in aeroplanes and things—with wings in Heaven, as we were told when we were children.

STEINER : I think in Heaven we will do just what we like. I will climb to the mountain-tops because I like to climb—and you shall fly. Anyway, we will meet on the top. Oh, Heaven will be all right.—But we talk no more of dying or it will spoil your lunch.

FANNY : I don't think it will—I'm awfully hungry.

STEINER : Ach, and lunch is so late. (*Goes towards kitchen and shouts*) Liese, wann wird denn eigentlich gegessen ?

[*The dark WOMAN appears at the kitchen door.*]

LIESE : Nur noch einige Minuten.

STEINER : Fräulein, bitte, hier ist——

LIESE (*interrupting with a little scream*) : Ach, du liebe Zeit, die Suppe kocht über. (*She rushes back into the kitchen.*)

STEINER (*laughing and explaining*) : The soup boil over. I am sorry *Mittagessen* is so late, but we cannot help it. Yesterday is the end of the season ; we send two maids back to Innsbruck, and when they go they take two others with them. So now there is only Liese, Minna, and the little Lenchen till we get someone else.

FANNY : How difficult for you. Have you many people staying here ?

STEINER : Not so many. Herr Feldmann and his wife—but they go to-morrow—and an English clergyman and his lady sister, they come yesterday ; they stay a week. And two



young English—very modern—they make love from books. Then there is the friend in the bath and you. Why, I do not know your name.

FANNY : Gray—Fanny Gray.

STEINER : See, we fill it in on the form—we have just time before lunch. (*He gets a registration form from his desk and brings it, with pen and ink, to the centre table.*)

FANNY : Oh, Edith always does those. I can never understand them.

STEINER : I help you.

[*FANNY sits on a chair at the front of the luncheon-table. STEINER sits on the table, leaning over her shoulder to direct her.*

Here is the name. (*She writes.*) Frances Gray. But that is not what you said just now—it was a little name!

FANNY : I'm always called Fanny.

STEINER : "Fanny." That is a nice name.

FANNY (*his direct gaze makes her a little shy, and she turns quickly to the form*) : What do I put next?

STEINER : Where you were born. (*She writes.*) But see, you do not put it in the right place.

FANNY : I—I'm afraid I can't see very well without my glasses. I'd better get them.

STEINER : Ach, no—you must not put them on again—they change you very much. But perhaps I am unkind—perhaps the eyes are tired without them?

FANNY : Oh no, not really—it's just that I can't see things that are close to me.

STEINER : Let me help you—then you will not need the glasses. (*He leans over her shoulder and guides her pen.*) Here—where you were born. (*She writes.*) Norwich—ach, I remember, there is a big cathedral.

FANNY : You've been there ?

STEINER : Oh yes—and to Salisbury and to Canterbury—I have been to three English towns with cathedrals. Very lovely, very peaceful—time has rested there. But they are full of old prayers—there is no room for new.

FANNY : But lots of people pray there.

STEINER : I know—but I could not. They are so large, so cold—I pray better by our little roadside shrines.

FANNY : But there are so many of them—we saw dozens of them driving here to-day. You can't pray at all of them.

STEINER : Only a little prayer—in the heart—and in the country one does not grudge it. In towns, one does not want to pray—I did not ever pray in London.

FANNY : Were you there long ?

STEINER : Nearly a year—to learn English.

FANNY : No wonder you speak so well.

STEINER : You think so ? That is good. It is nearly ten years ago, but we have many English guests—they are good practice for me. I like them so much. I was very happy in England.

FANNY : What did you do there ?

STEINER : At first I was a waiter—my father think it is good experience for me. But I was no good—twice I get sent away from big hotels.

FANNY : Why was that ?

STEINER : My face, it is not wooden enough. When the guests made fun, or if they had nice faces, I smiled at them—and that does not do in England. And then I was so bad with soup—always I slosh it a little. One day I slosh it a lot on to a lady's dress.

FANNY : Was she angry ?

STEINER : Oh no, she was most nice. I go down on my knees to mop it up, and she smile at me. The manager was most nice too, but he say he can no more have me for waiter—I am not safe. So I write to my father and he send me money to live in England. Just then we are quite rich.

FANNY : But I thought, after the war, everyone in Austria was poor.

STEINER : After the war ! Ach, yes—it was terrible. Everything gone and my two brothers buried in the mountains. My poor mother—I cannot think of it—she died two months before the peace—while I was fighting.

FANNY : How terrible for you.

STEINER : Such waste—such foolishness. And now—poor Austria ! But see, I make you sad ; that must not be—our countries are friends again. Listen. I tell you—now it is more cheerfuller. I had an uncle who goes to America when I was little—so big—I do not hardly remember him. In 1920 he die and left all his money to my father—real money, dollars. We are quite rich—we help the poor in the village and make a fine grave for my mother. And my father sent me plenty of money to England. That is not so sad ?

FANNY : How splendid for you. And what did you do for the rest of your time in England ?

STEINER : I look at things—there is so much to see—picture galleries, museums, theatres. I see all the sights—the Tower, Windsor, Hampton Court—where lived your naughty fat king with eight wives.

FANNY : Only six.

STEINER : Ach, I get him mixed—always I think it is Henry the Sixth with eight wives

instead of Henry the Eighth with six. You know, after I went to Hampton Court, I could not forget him. When I saw good old gentlemen in trains perhaps or 'buses, very fat, with nice gold watch-chains, I think, perhaps they have six wives!

FANNY : They haven't really.

STEINER : Oh, not all—but sometimes, I think. The English are very astonishing. But I like them so much. I made so many friends—I did not want to come back so soon.

FANNY : Why did you have to ?

STEINER : My father die and I had to come back to settle things. At first it was sad and lonely. I say, " I will shut the inn and travel," but then the spring come, and it is so good to be in the mountains again. I say, " Always have we been here—I will make the Rote Hirsch all fine and new, and many guests will come." So I build new rooms and the bath-house, and I advertise and write to my English friends—and now many people come, and we are always gay.

FANNY : Even in the winter ?

STEINER : Ach, in the winter it is not so good—but it is very beautiful in the snow, and sometimes we can have little sports. And we sit by the warm stove and read—and every year we go to Wien for a while.—But see, I talk all about me, and Fräulein Fanny cannot say a word. You shall tell me about yourself on the form—here is where you live—(*he guides her hand and she writes*)—Eccles, Lancs.—where is that ?

FANNY : It's near Manchester.

STEINER : Is that a gay town ?

FANNY : Not very—but there's some good music.

STEINER : Well, that is something.—Now you must put your profession—what you do. But perhaps you are just a lazy lady ?



FANNY : Oh no—I teach. (*She writes where he indicates.*)

STEINER (*reading*) : Schoolmistress. Ah-ha—now I know !

FANNY : Know what ?

STEINER : The spectacles—you wear them to frighten the children—to make you more severe.

FANNY : Of course not—and I don't have to be severe. I only teach the little ones.

STEINER : And what do you teach them ?

FANNY : A little of everything, and singing and needlework. I'm not very clever—I haven't any degrees.

STEINER : Degrees ?

FANNY : You get them for passing examinations—you can't get really good jobs without them. Edith's an M.A.

STEINER : That is very great ?

FANNY : Well, it's very important. She teaches real things—mathematics and science.

STEINER : She does not teach the little ones ?

FANNY : Oh no.

STEINER : I am glad—I can just see her : “What is twice two ? You do not know ?” Bang ! (*He hits the table with a fork.*)

FANNY : What nonsense ! She's not a bit like that. (*She puzzles over the form.*) What does this mean ?

STEINER : Single or married.

FANNY : Oh. (*She writes.*)

STEINER (*reading*) : But you are engaged ?

FANNY : No. What makes you think so ?

STEINER : I think it is strange that you are not, that is all.

FANNY : What do I put next ?

STEINER : Your age.

FANNY : How silly. Why do I have to put that ?

STEINER : I don't know, but you must.

FANNY : But that's nothing to do with the authorities—and, anyhow, they can't tell if what you write is the truth.

STEINER : Not unless they see your passport.

FANNY : No one bothers to read that—they scarcely look at it at the frontier. (*She thinks a few seconds, and then writes.*)

STEINER (*reading and breaking into a loud laugh*) : Ach, that is naughty—the police come for you—you make fun.

FANNY (*nervously*) : What do you mean ?

STEINER : You are not so old—you do that for play. Not even with the spectacles on are you twenty-nine.

FANNY : Oh yes, I am—(*a fraction of a pause*)—quite.

STEINER : Really ? But you look so young—perhaps it is because you are so much with little children. But no—you do not mean it—you tease me——

FANNY : No, really, I—— (*She breaks off and returns to the form.*) What do I put here ?

STEINER : That is the date you leave—but do not put it yet. You will like it here—you stay a long, long while.

FANNY : I'm afraid not—we have to go to-morrow.

STEINER : To-morrow ?

FANNY : Yes. Didn't Edith tell you ? She ought to have done. I expect that makes a difference to your terms—if we're not *en pension*.

STEINER : Ach, the terms do not matter—but you must not go. It is so lovely here—so many little climbs that ladies can do—so healthy. Ach, you please to stay a while——

FANNY : I'm afraid we can't. You see, we're going on to Italy to-morrow. We meant to have stayed another night in Innsbruck, but we thought we'd like just one day in the mountains.

STEINER : But why go so soon ? Stay a week, a few days even, before you go to Italy.

FANNY : We have to meet a friend in Venice—Miss Travers, our geography mistress ; she's rather—elderly ; we couldn't disappoint her.

STEINER : Then let the friend go to meet her and you stay here.

FANNY : All alone ? I couldn't.

STEINER : We would take care of you.

FANNY : Edith would never let me.

STEINER : But she cannot stop you—you are grown-up—though you do not look it.

FANNY : But she'd be so hurt. I couldn't, really. I must go with her to-morrow. (*Returning to the form*) What will the date be ?

STEINER (*laughing and snatching the form*) : No, you shall not put it—perhaps still you change your mind.

FANNY : No, really, please give it to me. I haven't even signed it.

STEINER : Never mind, we do that later. (*He stands and holds the form out of her reach. Laughing, she tries to get it.*) No, you shall not have it. (*He looks down at her, smiling.*) I think you will stay. (*FANNY's eyes are held by his for a second, then, suddenly shy, she looks away.*)

[*At that moment, the sound of voluble German is heard, and a stout LADY and a stout GENTLEMAN,*

*extremely hot and laden with haversacks, come through the front door. The LADY is in a short-sleeved cotton frock, the GENTLEMAN wears the peasant costume.*

*(Greeting the newcomers)* Guten Morgen ! Sie sind so früh aufgestanden—ich habe Sie gar nicht gesehen. Haben Sie einen guten Aufstieg gehabt ?

THE MAN : Ausgezeichnet ! Wir sind bis ans Himmelskreuz gekommen.

STEINER : Sehr gut. *(With a gesture towards FANNY)* Bitte, hier wir haben einen andern Gast. Fräulein Gray, this is Herr Feldmann—he speaks most good English.

FELDMANN : How are you ? This is my wife—she does not speak much, but she understand a lot. *(He has a very strong accent, but speaks English with pride and pleasure.)*

FANNY : How do you do ?

FELDMANN : We are so hot we are one spot of grease.

STEINER : Möchten Sie etwas Bier ?

FELDMANN : Ja, danke.

FRAU FELDMANN : Ich könnte das Meer austrinken !

*[STEINER goes into the bar.]*

FELDMANN *(putting down his haversack and settling in a chair at right of luncheon-table)* : You have just come ?

FANNY : Yes—by the 'bus.

FRAU FELDMANN *(she has collapsed with relief into a chair near the table by the window)* : Bleiben Sie lang ?

FELDMANN : She asks you if you stay long.

FANNY : Only for the night.



FELDMANN (*translating to his wife*) : Nur für eine Nacht. (*To FANNY*) You are alone ?

FANNY : Oh no, I have a friend with me. She's in the bath-house now.

FELDMANN : Ach, ja—she has gone to look at it ?

FANNY : No, to have a bath.

FELDMANN : She is ill ?

FANNY : No.

FELDMANN : Then why does she have a bath when lunch is ready ?

FANNY : I suppose she just wanted one.

FELDMANN (*roaring with laughter, and then translating this most excellent joke into German for his wife's benefit*) : Die Freundin dieser Dame nimmt vor dem Essen ein Bad.

FRAU FELDMANN (*laughing heartily*) : Na, das ist komisch. Nein, aber so was !

FELDMANN (*still laughing*) : Ach, the English are most wonderful !

[STEINER comes from the bar with beer for the FELDMANNS. They drink it, with various salutations of "Prosit !" "Auf Ihr Wohl," etc.]

FRAU FELDMANN (*after a long drink*) : Ach, das schmeckt aber !

FELDMANN : Ja, das schmeckt nach mehr.

STEINER : So you have climbed the Himmelskreuz after all ?

FELDMANN : Yes, at last. (*To FANNY*) Every day I say to my wife we will climb him, and every day she say she is too old and too fat. But to-day it is our last day—I make her get up at five and we climb before the sun is up.

FANNY : How wonderful to be so high ! Why didn't you stay up there for the afternoon ?

FELDMANN : We must get back for *Mittagessen*.

FANNY : Couldn't you have taken something with you ?

FELDMANN : Oh, there is a little inn there—but we pay for *Mittagessen* here.

FANNY : Oh, I see.

FELDMANN : And Herr Steiner gives us such good food.

FANNY : I'm so glad—because I'm so hungry.

[STEINER *rushes into the kitchen*.

Could I climb as high as the Himmelskreuz ?

FELDMANN : I think you would get tired, but there is the *Denkmal*—that is not far. I could take you this afternoon.

FANNY : Thank you, but Herr Steiner is going to show me the church.

FELDMANN : He should show you the *Denkmal* too—you know what I mean—a war memorial.

FANNY : Wherever we go they tell us we ought to see the *Denkmal*—and they do seem rather the same.

FELDMANN : Why, yes, but they are a reason for a walk—one cannot walk without a reason.

[ALARIC and AUDREY *come downstairs*.

AUDREY : Hello, Herr Feldmann. Had a good climb ?

ALARIC : Did you get to the Himmelskreuz ?

FELDMANN : Yes, right up to him.

AUDREY : Splendid—on your last day, too.

FELDMANN : Yes. We are sorry to go.

AUDREY : We shall miss your music—we must have a special concert to-night.

FELDMANN : Yes, we must have all the old favourites. (*He suddenly remembers that they do not know FANNY.*) This is Miss—I have forgotten the name.

FANNY : Gray.

AUDREY : How do you do ?

ALARIC : Staying long ?

[*At this moment EDITH comes back from her bath, and is considerably flustered at seeing so many people. She scuttles like a frightened hen to the staircase, but unfortunately drops her soap on the way.*]

FELDMANN : Allow me—— (*He springs up gallantly to retrieve the soap.*) You are the friend of Miss Gray ? How do you do ? You have had a good wash ?

EDITH (*considerably surprised at this voluble greeting*) : Yes, thank you.

FELDMANN : That is nice. Herr Steiner's baths are so splendid—we all wash here quite often. (*Returning the soap to the sponge-bag*) Shall I carry him for you ?

EDITH : Oh, no thank you.

FELDMANN : You must be quick—*Mittagessen* is just ready.

[*EDITH bolts upstairs, but unfortunately FELDMANN has his foot on the belt of her mackintosh and she is dragged back. Frantic apologies ensue, from which she at last escapes.*]

AUDREY : I'm surprised at you, Herr Feldmann—trying to undress a lady you don't even know.

FELDMANN (*horrified*) : But it was an accident. Surely you do not think—— Ach, I see ; it is a joke. (*Laughs uproariously.*) Always you tease.— Ach, here is *Mittagessen*.

[*LIESE enters with a large soup-tureen, followed by MINNA with the soup-plates. The party settles*]

at the table amidst general noise, conversation being in both English and German. STEINER, returning from the kitchen, escorts FANNY to the small table, where she sits with her back to the window. He then goes back to the centre table. LIESE serves the soup and MINNA hands the plates round, but STEINER himself brings FANNY's. He carries it with the greatest care, almost walking on tiptoe, and says as he places it in front of her :

STEINER : See, I do not slosh it this time.

[There is a good deal of noise at the centre table—  
—anxiety on LIESE's part that everyone should have what they want, and jokes between AUDREY and HERR FELDMANN. Suddenly, LENCHEN is heard singing, and she runs on with a basket of the pale purple autumn crocuses that grow in so many meadows of Tyrol. STEINER takes the flowers from her and she runs into the kitchen. Delightedly he arranges the crocuses in the vase on FANNY's table, whispering, as he does so :

To match the pretty dressing-gown.

[His manner to her is charming, but it must be remembered that he is charming—indeed, almost affectionate—to all his guests. There is, as yet, nothing serious in his attention to FANNY—she is merely a particularly honoured and delightful guest. But it is obvious that she is already very much attracted by him. Someone at the centre table calls for beer and STEINER goes to the bar for it. Left alone, FANNY is far more interested in the flowers than in her soup—she touches them and smells them.

EDITH comes downstairs, having made a remarkably quick change—she is still fastening up her cuffs. FELDMANN greets her, as she passes, with :

FELDMANN : But you have been most quick.

[She crosses and sits at the small table with FANNY.

EDITH (she is very hungry and wants her soup) :  
Waiter !



FANNY : Sssh ! Herr Steiner is waiting on us—they're short-handed.

EDITH : Are they ? Still, the place seems very clean.

FANNY : It's spotless—and so charming. I was wondering—couldn't we stay a day or two ?

EDITH : Of course not. Travers is waiting for us.

FANNY : We could wire—it's so lovely here. The mountains are wonderful.

EDITH : I daresay—but we can't possibly climb them. You can see them from the train.

FANNY : It isn't quite the same thing.

EDITH : Well, we can't possibly change our plans now. I wonder if I'm ever going to get any soup ?

*[STEINER has returned from the bar and is getting EDITH's soup. As he reaches her side she notices the vase of crocuses.]*

EDITH : There isn't much room, is there ?

*[She moves the crocuses on to the window-sill. FANNY quietly puts them back, at her side of the table.]*

FANNY *(in response to EDITH's astonished look)* : I like them.

*[STEINER, waiting at Edith's side, is watching. He catches FANNY's eye, gives a little chuckle—and "sloshes" the soup, only just missing Edith. FANNY drops her eyes and attacks her soup with feverish energy.]*

## END OF ACT I

## ACT II

### SCENE I

SCENE : *The same. It is evening, and the heavy hanging lamp, which has been wired for electricity, is lit. Another lamp stands on the centre table. The door is open, and it is not yet quite dark outside.*

*Supper is over, but the table is not cleared, and AUDREY and ALARIC, the FELDMANNS and MR. MAYNE, are still sitting at it. EDITH and FANNY are at their separate table by the window. None of the MEN have changed their clothes, but EDITH is now wearing a jumper alleged to be "semi-evening," and FANNY is in a flowered silk dress—home-made, as are all her clothes. AUDREY now wears a very striking studio frock.*

*STEINER is finishing a harp solo. Everyone is very still. The gentle notes of the harp seem to accentuate the peace of the lamp-lit room. At the conclusion of STEINER'S piece there is general applause, which he acknowledges with small, formal bows.*

MAYNE : Thank you, thank you. That was delightful. (*There is a murmur of thanks from everyone.*) So very seldom that one hears the harp nowadays. What made you take it up ?

STEINER : Always we play it—it is very old, the harp ; my father and my grandfather, they play it too. With my two brothers, we make a little orchestra. See. (*He takes a photograph from the wall by the stove and hands it to MAYNE.*) Karl play the violin and Alois the piano.

MAYNE : Ah, yes, most interesting. Where are your brothers now ?

STEINER : Alas ! killed in the war.

MAYNE : Tragic ! tragic ! Such fine fellows, too.

STEINER : My father, too, is dead, so I must play alone—except when we have such musical guests. (*He bows to ALARIC and to the FELDMANNS, and then goes over to show the photograph to FANNY.*)

MAYNE : I recollect that my sister once thought of taking up the harp, but our mother considered her arms rather too thin for it. She fell back on the mandolin.

STEINER : Does she still fall back on it ?

MAYNE : Oh, not for many years—just strums the piano occasionally.

STEINER : Ach, then she must play for us when she comes in. It is most strange she is not back before. You are sure she went to Glieders ?

MAYNE : Oh, quite. I saw her on the 'bus myself. I must admit I hardly expected her to be so late.

FELDMANN : Perhaps she go to see the *Denkmal* ?

FANNY : What, another *Denkmal* ?

AUDREY : Oh, the place is studded with them—all for different wars. But it wouldn't take her half an hour to see the lot.

MAYNE : I hardly think a *Denkmal* would attract her. I suspect the shops. Florence is an inveterate shop-gazer.

ALARIC : My dear man, there are only four shops in Glieders—and three of them are butchers'.

MAYNE : Then, really, I scarcely know—I suppose there aren't any Pierrots ?

STEINER (*puzzled*) : Pierrots ?

MAYNE : People in white, you know, who sing.

STEINER : Ach, yes—but not to-day. To-morrow, in the church.

MAYNE : No, no—you misunderstand me. I mean entertainers—but I hardly expect—  
Perhaps there is a cinema ?

STEINER : No, there is no kino nearer than Innsbruck.

MAYNE : Then it really is a little odd. But she's quite capable of taking care of herself. She'll probably be on the next 'bus.

STEINER : I hope so. If she were on the mountains we would make a search-party, but in Glieders——

MAYNE : Oh, she's sure to be all right—please don't distress yourself about it. Won't you give us another tune ?

STEINER : With pleasure—but first we must have a song. (*He bows politely to HERR FELDMANN.*)

ALARIC : Let's get the table out of the way first. Everyone finished ?

STEINER : Ach, yes. (*He goes to kitchen door and calls*) Minna !

[MINNA comes in, and the table is quickly cleared, the guests assisting by stacking up their plates. LIESE also comes to help, but a bell rings in the bar and, taking off her apron and giving it to MINNA, she goes in to serve customers from the village.]

Minna, halten Sie das Essen warm für Fräulein Mayne.

MINNA : Gewiss.

EDITH : Would it be possible for us to have some coffee ?

STEINER : But of course. Minna, zwei Kaffee für die Damen.

ALARIC : Good idea—we'll have some too. Herr Feldmann, will you and Frau Feldmann have some coffee with us, as it's your last night ?

FELDMANN : That is too kind. You should have it with us.

ALARIC : Not at all. I thought of it first.



FELDMANN : Ach, but——

STEINER : See, to-night it is a party—everyone shall have coffee with me. Minna, ein, zwei—*(he counts the people in the room)*—acht Kaffee. *(MINNA goes into kitchen.)* And we save some for Miss Mayne when she has had her dinner—we keep it warm for her.

MAYNE : It's really very kind of you.

STEINER : Now we move the table back. *(He and FELDMANN lift it and place it against the right wall, MAYNE carrying the lamp.)*

ALARIC *(who has strolled over to the stove—a number of books are lying on the seat which runs round it)* : Oh, here's the book I promised you, Mr. Mayne. Care to have it ?

MAYNE : Thanks, I should very much like to have a look at it. *(He takes the book and sits in a chair at the right, reading by the light of the lamp on the table.)*

*[The FELDMANNS settle on the seat running round the stove. ALARIC strums the piano while AUDREY looks at some music. STEINER takes two cushions from the stove seat over to EDITH and FANNY.]*

STEINER : The chairs are hard. Will you not have these ?

FANNY : Thank you.

EDITH : I am a little tired.

*[There is a hum of small talk from the group at the back, and then, suddenly, the motor-horn is heard. Everyone looks up.]*

STEINER : Ah, here is the auto. *(Runs out of front door.)*

MAYNE : Florence is sure to be on this one. *(Goes to door.)*

*[The 'bus is heard outside, and the sound of voices. Then STEINER hurries back.]*

STEINER : She is not there.

MAYNE : What ?

AUDREY : I say !

ALARIC : Good Lord !

STEINER : It is the last 'bus. (*Crosses to his desk.*)  
It is most serious.

MAYNE : What are you going to do ?

STEINER : Ring up the police in Glieders.  
(*Speaks into telephone*) Bitte, verbindung mit  
dreizehn, Glieders. (*He waits while everyone  
watches him, silent.*) Bitte, ist das das Polizeiamt ?  
Eine von meinen Gasten ist bis jetzt noch nicht  
zurückgekommen. Könnten Sie nicht Erkundig-  
ungen einziehen ? (*He listens.*) Ja, sie ist ein  
Fräulein Mayne. (*Listens, then turns to MAYNE*)  
What was she wearing ?

MAYNE : A tweed coat and skirt and—yes—she  
had her mackintosh and——

[*The door opens and Miss MAYNE makes a  
dramatic entrance. She has no hat, no coat, and no  
mackintosh. The sleeves have been taken out of her  
blouse, but she has put them on again and rolled them  
round her arms. She stands blinking at the light.*

Florence !

STEINER : Miss Mayne !

ALARIC : Good God !

MAYNE : What on earth's happened—have you  
had an accident ?

MISS MAYNE : I—I——

MAYNE : Where have you been ?

MISS MAYNE : I've been lost.

MAYNE : Lost !

[*Exclamations from everyone.*

STEINER (*speaking rapidly into 'phone*) : Es ist alles in Ordnung—das Fräulein kommt eben zurück—bitte, entschuldigen Sie die Störung. (*He puts the telephone down and comes quickly over to Miss MAYNE.*) Come and sit down—you shall tell us everything when you are rested. (*Leads her to the chair vacated by MAYNE.*)

MISS MAYNE : Thank you. (*She sits.*) Ooh !

MAYNE : Are you hurt ?

STEINER : She is just stiff. (*He runs into the bar.*)

MAYNE : But what's happened to you, Florence. Have you been attacked ?

MISS MAYNE : Edward, will you kindly stop shouting questions at me ? I tell you, I've been lost.

MAYNE : But your dress—your sleeves——

MISS MAYNE : Oh, those ? I cut them out.

MAYNE : Cut them out ?

MISS MAYNE : I was hot.

MAYNE : But surely——

MISS MAYNE : My dear Edward, I can assure you sleeves are quite unbearable when you are climbing up a mountain on all fours.

STEINER (*comes back with some brandy. Going down on one knee beside MISS MAYNE*) : Drink this.

[MISS MAYNE *drinks*. MAYNE *is on her right*, STEINER *on her left*. AUDREY *sits on the table just behind her*. The others, though not actually grouped round her, are completely absorbed in her story.

MAYNE : But I don't understand—I saw you on the 'bus to Glieders. What were you doing on the mountains ?

MISS MAYNE : I was taking a short cut home. (*She drinks again.*)

STEINER : But there is only one way from Glieders beside the road—that is by the Himmelshütte.

MISS MAYNE : That's where I was. (*Takes another sip of brandy.*)

FELDMANN : Ach, Gott !

MISS MAYNE : The signpost said it would only take two and a half hours.

ALARIC : It isn't really far, as the crow flies.

MISS MAYNE : Unfortunately, I don't happen to be a crow. I crawled most of the way. (*The brandy is already beginning to affect her, and to her customary vagueness is added a blurred but dignified deliberation.*)

STEINER (*soothingly*) : I know, it is very steep.

MISS MAYNE : I should call it vertical—and so unexpected. It started off as a gently sloping meadow-path. Though even that was most unpleasant—seething with grasshoppers—enormous ones—they positively bruised my legs. (*Suddenly firing a question at STEINER*) Ought grasshoppers to be as large as that ?

STEINER : I don't know—but they are.

MISS MAYNE (*aggrievedly*) : They never are in England—and so restless. And the heat—(*Again cross-examining STEINER*) Ought it to be as hot as that in September ?

STEINER : The sun is on that side of the mountain in the afternoon.

MISS MAYNE : It is. And no shade at all. (*Again attacking STEINER*) Oughtn't you to plant trees ?

[*Smilingly, STEINER takes the glass from her.*

I was quite exhausted before I really started to climb, and when I did—(*confidentially, to*



STEINER)—do you know, I had to go on my hands and knees ?

MAYNE : Why didn't you turn back ?

MISS MAYNE : Because I kept thinking I was there—and when I got there I wasn't—I was just where I was. Mountains are very deceitful.

STEINER (*soothingly*) : I know, I know.

MISS MAYNE : Mind you, I was surprised at my own agility. I really think I could have managed quite well if I hadn't had my clothes on.

MAYNE (*protesting*) : My dear——

MISS MAYNE : I mean so many of them. Do you know what I did with my coat ? I dragged it—and my mackintosh—and my bag. I strapped them together with my belt and I dragged them—bump—bump—bump.

MAYNE : Where are they now ?

MISS MAYNE : Up at the Himmelshütte. I left them at the inn. The manager is very kindly going to bring them back one day.

ALARIC : So you got to the top ? Bravo !

MISS MAYNE : It was. Very bravo. That was where I took my sleeves out—the manager kindly lent me some scissors—while I was drinking my beer.

MAYNE : But you don't drink beer !

MISS MAYNE : Oh yes, I do. After climbing a mountain I drink anything.

STEINER : But I cannot understand why you took so long to get back—it is only one hour down from the Himmelshütte.

MISS MAYNE : I took a short cut.

STEINER : Ach !

MISS MAYNE : It seemed such a waste of time to

go down that silly winding path, so I thought I'd come direct, through a little wood.

MAYNE : Well ?

MISS MAYNE : It was a round wood—perfectly round. And it was all middle. And it was completely surrounded by cows.

MAYNE : But you're not frightened of cows.

MISS MAYNE : Certainly not. I like cows—some cows. I liked these when first I heard their bells. I thought I could find my way out of the wood by going in their direction.

ALARIC : Splendid ! You're quite a boy scout.

MISS MAYNE : That's what I thought—but it wasn't feasible. Most unfeasible. They moved.

MAYNE : What moved ?

MISS MAYNE : The cows. I should think they were dashing wildly in all directions. No sooner did you follow a bell there—(*waves her right hand*)—than you heard it there (*a corresponding gesture with her left hand. To STEINER accusingly*) Don't you think cows ought to be moored up ?

STEINER : It is not very kind to the cows.

MISS MAYNE : Still, humans come first. I can assure you, it was no fault of the cows that I ever got out of that wood. It was sheer carelessness on my part—I wasn't looking where I was going.

MAYNE : And where were you when you got out ?

MISS MAYNE : My dear Edward, how do I know where I were ? I can only tell you I was on a perfectly bare bit of mountain, and the sun was setting and a bitter wind was blowing. (*To STEINER*) Ought it to be so cold after such a hot day ?

STEINER : It often is when the sun goes.

MISS MAYNE : I had to put my sleeves on again—though they weren't much use. (*She regards her arms with far-away interest.*)

AUDREY : Thank goodness you got out of the wood before it was dark.

MISS MAYNE : Yes, but I didn't get off the mountain. Do you know, I had to do the last bit sitting down ?

AUDREY : How very painful.

MISS MAYNE : It was—most painful. There's only one thing more tiring than going up a mountain and that's coming down.

AUDREY : Makes the back of your legs ache, doesn't it ?

MISS MAYNE : All of my legs ache.

MAYNE : Well, you're safe now—and you'd better go straight to bed. These young people are waiting to have a little concert.

MISS MAYNE : But I like concerts.

STEINER (*gently helping her to her feet*) : You can hear it from your room, and Minna shall bring you some supper.

MISS MAYNE (*finding the earth rather unsteady*) : Do you know, I'm not at all sure I want any supper. I think it must be the sun—but I don't feel quite normal.

STEINER : You are so tired—you shall just have some soup.

MISS MAYNE : Yes, I think I could manage soup. (*With STEINER's assistance, she moves towards staircase.*) Oh, my legs ! Isn't it strange that they can feel both stiff and wobbly at the same time ?

STEINER : They will soon be better. Is there anything you would like ?

MISS MAYNE (*confidentially*) : Could I have a hot water bottle ?

AUDREY : Rather ! I'll lend you mine.

MISS MAYNE (*rather taken aback*) : Oh, thank you but I don't suppose it's the kind I've been accustomed to.

AUDREY : But it's a nice rubber one—with a pink woolly cover.

MISS MAYNE : A pink one ? How funny—mine has a pink cover. I left it in England—in the bathroom cupboard.

AUDREY : I'll get mine for you now.

MISS MAYNE : How very kind of you. And fancy it having a pink cover—it just shows how small the world is. My brother was explaining to me this morning about you—I mean, about your—experiment. You mustn't think I'm narrow-minded—I like to keep in touch with modern thought. You must tell me all about it.

AUDREY : Yes, in the morning. (*She takes MISS MAYNE's left arm and assists STEINER to guide her firmly to the stairs.*)

MISS MAYNE (*from foot of stairs*) : And you mustn't think I was curious. It was just that I was interested—and, now that I know about it, I shall be—more interested.

ALARIC (*murmurs*) : Oh, my God !

[STEINER and AUDREY succeed in getting MISS MAYNE round the bend of the stairs. MAYNE follows.]

Poor old darling, she's completely tipsy.

EDITH : I don't wonder—no food and all that brandy.

FANNY : Oughtn't we to help her ?

ALARIC : Oh, I'm sure Herr Steiner will be a mother to her.

[STEINER and MAYNE come downstairs.]



STEINER : Miss Audrey is kindly helping her to bed. (*He goes into the kitchen with AUDREY's pink-covered hot-water bottle.*)

MAYNE : I really must apologise——

[*Everyone protests that this is quite unnecessary.*  
STEINER comes back from the kitchen.

STEINER : Poor lady, she will be stiff to-morrow—but she shall have a health bath.

ALARIC : Splendid ! At last somebody's going to have a health bath. We're all so disgustingly healthy that it never gives you a chance, Herr Steiner.

[*MINNA comes from the kitchen with coffee.*

STEINER : Ach, here is coffee. (*He assists MINNA to hand the cups round. ALARIC takes a cup for AUDREY and puts a saucer on top to keep it hot.*) We will not send any to Miss Mayne, in case it keep her awake.

MAYNE : I shouldn't think anything would do that.

STEINER : We send her some soup. Minna, bringen Sie den Fräulein Mayne etwas Suppe hinauf.

[*MINNA goes back to the kitchen.*

MAYNE : It really is most kind of you. I'm so sorry to give so much trouble.—Please don't let us interrupt our concert any longer.

STEINER : Ach, there is plenty of time for the concert. Herr Feldmann, you will give us a song ?

ALARIC : Yes, come along. What shall it be ? How about the "Erl König" ?

FELDMANN : Ach—not to begin with.

ALARIC (*looking through a book of songs*) : Let's have "Frühlingsnacht."

FANNY : Oh, do sing that—it's lovely.

STEINER : You know it ? I am sure Herr Feldmann will sing it for you.

ALARIC : Come on, Herr Feldmann.

[ALARIC accompanies and FELDMANN sings. He has an extremely good and sympathetic voice, and throws himself whole-heartedly into the song. Its romantic gaiety has a distinct effect on everyone, and a party-like spirit invades the room—even EDITH unbends a little. At the end of the song there is general applause, during which MINNA goes upstairs with hot-water bottle and soup for Miss MAYNE.]

FELDMANN : Now it is someone else's turn.

STEINER : I know Miss Gray teaches singing. Will she please to sing for us ?

FANNY : Oh, I couldn't. I've hardly any voice.

EDITH : Nonsense, Fanny, you sing very nicely.

[Everyone attempts to persuade FANNY.]

FANNY : But I don't suppose there's anything I know.

ALARIC : Oh, there are lots of things—we've some English folk-songs. No German, I suppose ?

FANNY : Well, I do know one little German song—I teach it to the girls—"Wenn ich früh in dem Garten geh."

ALARIC : Splendid. We've got it here. (*Finds the song.*)

STEINER : See, you must stand here. (*He leads FANNY out into the room.*)

ALARIC : Half a minute. I must light the candles for this. (*Does so.*) There.

[FANNY has a small and pretty voice, and sings with absolute simplicity. In her flowered silk frock,

*with the golden light of the candles behind her, she makes a very charming picture. STEINER watches her with growing admiration. The tiny song is received with general applause.*

MAYNE : Delightful. What do the words mean ?

STEINER : It is about a lady who goes into the garden very early in the morning, wearing a green hat—and of how her first thoughts are of her lover.

MAYNE : Charming. Have you a green hat, Miss Gray ?

FANNY (*smiling, but a little shy*) : As a matter of fact, I have.

STEINER : Then you shall wear it in our garden.

FELDMANN : But you must promise to think of your lover !

FANNY : What nonsense ! I—I—haven't one.

FELDMANN : Ach, you must not ask us to believe that !

STEINER : See, you must not tease her—she goes all pink.—Sing us another song, Miss Gray—an English one.

ALARIC : Yes, do, please. Do you know these ? (*Hands her a book of songs.*)

FANNY (*looking through book*) : I know " Searching for Lambs "—if I can remember the words.

ALARIC : Oh, good. That's one of my favourites.

[FANNY sings, again with utter simplicity. The room is very still. Her small, crystal-like notes seem to capture some of the freshness of early morning. The words of the song are as follows :

As I went out one May morning  
One May morning betime,  
I met a maid, from home had strayed,  
Just as the sun did shine.

“ What makes you rise so soon, my dear,  
Your journey to pursue ?  
Your pretty little feet, that tread so sweet,  
Scarce stir the morning dew.”

“ I go to feed my father’s flocks,  
His young and tender lambs,  
That over hills and over vales  
Lie waiting for their dams.”

“ Oh, stay, oh, stay, you handsome maid,  
And rest a moment here,  
For there is none but you alone  
That I do love so dear.”

“ How gloriously the sun does shine,  
How pleasant is the air,  
I’d sooner rest on my true love’s breast  
Than any other where.”

“ For thou art mine and I am thine.  
No man shall un-comfort thee,  
We’ll join our hands in true love’s bands  
And married we will be.”

*[At the conclusion of the song the thanks, though really genuine, are quietly offered—perhaps because everyone is still ensnared in the atmosphere FANNY has created.]*

STEINER : That was most beautiful. You should sing that on our mountains in the spring. Will you not sing again ?

FANNY : Oh no, not again. *(She goes back to her chair. STEINER follows her with his eyes.)*

ALARIC : Then come along, Herr Feldmann, it’s your turn again. What shall we have—“ Im wunderschönen Monat Mai ? ”

FELDMANN : Yes, I sing it. *(ALARIC finds the song.)*

EDITH *(rising)* : Please forgive me, but before you start I think I must go to bed. I’m so tired I can hardly sit up.



FELDMANN : I am so sorry.

EDITH : I didn't sleep at all last night. (*To STEINER*) I told you——

STEINER : But to-night I hope you will sleep most well.

EDITH : I'm sure I shall ! I'm so sorry to leave your little concert—but I can hardly keep my eyes open.—Are you coming, Fanny ?

FANNY : In just a few minutes—after Herr Feldmann's song.

EDITH : Very well—but don't be too long. Remember, you have a long journey to-morrow. (*Goes towards stairs.*)

MAYNE : I hope the music will not disturb you.

STEINER : Ach, no—the room is at the back ; you will scarcely hear it.

[*STEINER takes a key from the board in his "office" and hands it to EDITH. Everyone says good-night as she goes.*]

ALARIC : Now, then, Herr Feldmann—"Im wunderschönen Monat Mai."

MAYNE : I wish I understood German. What's this song about ?

STEINER : "In the wonderfully beautiful month of May." But you do not need to understand the words—the music tells you enough.

[*FELDMANN sings this very lovely lyric with great feeling. While he does so, STEINER stands leaning against the stove, watching FANNY. He is already charmed by her, and his sympathetic nature is stirred by the beauty of the music, so that unconsciously the emotion thus awakened in him is centred on her. She too is deeply affected by the song ; at its conclusion she sits very still, lost in a dream. ALARIC and MAYNE thank FELDMANN.*]

FELDMANN : Now it is Herr Steiner's turn to play the harp.

STEINER : Ach, no, it is too hot. You do not mind if I open the door ? (*Crosses and does so.*) Look, Miss Gray—summer lightning on the Himmelsberg.

[FANNY goes to him, and they stand leaning against the open door, looking into the night. ALARIC and the FELDMANNs are grouped round the piano, talking softly. Occasionally ALARIC strums a little phrase of music. MR. MAYNE begins to read his book.]

FANNY : How lovely. The air's like spring.

STEINER (*smiling*) : Im wunderschönen Monat Mai ?—Will you not come for a little walk ?

FANNY : Oh no—I must go to bed or I shall wake Edith. She had no sleep last night.

STEINER : But you are not tired ?

FANNY : No. I feel as if I could climb a mountain.

STEINER : All right. We climb one.

FANNY : I shouldn't like to, really. I should be afraid.

STEINER : I think we would not climb very high. (*Persuasively*) A little way ?

FANNY : I mustn't. Poor Edith's so tired.

STEINER : And you are so wide awake. Your eyes have seen the other stars and twinkle at them.

FANNY (*with a long look at the sky*) : Such lovely stars. I hate to leave them.

STEINER : Why do you not say good-night to them from your balcony ?

FANNY (*eagerly*) : Yes, I could do that—and slip back without waking Edith. I *must* go now—before they start to play again.

[But as she turns from the door, ALARIC starts Grieg's "To the Spring." She crosses to the staircase very quietly, followed by STEINER. MAYNE and FELDMANN see that she is going and rise, but she motions them to sit down and be quiet. ALARIC does not see her, and goes on playing. With a whispered "Good-night" to Steiner, she goes upstairs. He stands looking after her till the curtain falls. The music continues.

## END OF SCENE I (ACT II)

### SCENE 2

SCENE : *Two balconies. Late evening. It is very dark. One can just distinguish the two balconies, side by side, with about four feet between them. A window opens on to each ; that on the left is in darkness, but there is a light behind the drawn curtains of the one on the right. There is a faint glimmer of starlight.*

*When the curtain rises, FANNY, in her mauve dressing-gown, is leaning on the rail of the right-hand balcony, staring straight in front of her. After a moment EDITH appears at the window.*

EDITH : Fanny dear, do come in. You'll catch cold.

FANNY : Nonsense. There isn't a breath of wind. Do come out a minute—it's so lovely.

[EDITH comes out on to the balcony. She is wearing a very seriously-minded dressing-gown, and carries a pot of cold cream and a face towel.

EDITH : Do you suppose this balcony will hold us ?

FANNY : Of course. Everybody uses them here.

EDITH : Yes—and I expect nobody repairs

them. They all look as if they were just about to fall off. (*She sniffs.*) Can you smell drains?

FANNY : No. Can you?

EDITH (*grudgingly*) : I suppose not. Somehow, I always expect to smell them on the Continent. (*She knocks against something.*) What on earth's that?

FANNY : A plant, I think.

EDITH : What an absurd place to put it. I nearly knocked it off. I can't see anything.

FANNY : Your eyes'll get used to it soon—it's the mountain that makes it so dark.

EDITH : I can't see any mountain.

FANNY : You can't see anything else—that's all mountain, right up to where the stars begin.

EDITH : Is it? But there's a star in the middle of it.

FANNY : That must be a light.

EDITH : Do you suppose people can see us?

FANNY : Heavens, no, Edith—it's miles away.

EDITH : But I mean the villagers?

FANNY : The village is on the other side of the hotel. There's nothing on this side but the meadows, right away to the mountains.

EDITH : How do you know?

FANNY : I noticed it this afternoon.

EDITH : You're not usually so observant.

FANNY : But I love this place.—Edith, couldn't we stay for a little while? We could wire Travers.

EDITH : But we've booked our rooms—and you know we've only just enough money to do all we planned.



FANNY : But need we do it all ? I'm so tired of travelling in hot carriages—and it's so lovely here. We could do Venice next year.

EDITH : You know perfectly well that we shan't be able to come abroad next year. Look how long it's taken us to save up for this holiday.

FANNY : That's all the more reason why I want to stay. I can't bear to think of leaving all this beauty for ever.

EDITH : And I can't bear to think of missing Venice.

FANNY : Then let me stay on here alone.

EDITH : Fanny ! You're not serious ?

FANNY : Yes, I am. I'd be quite all right. I'd join you later.

EDITH (*indignantly*) : Join me later ! You know we've only got a week in Venice and then we start for home.

FANNY : Well, you could collect me on the way back.

EDITH : Fanny, don't be idiotic. You know our tickets are booked—we don't touch Innsbruck on the way back.

FANNY : We could excess the tickets.

EDITH : Oh, could we ? Well, if you've come into a fortune, I haven't. And you'll have to pay for your room in Venice. You can't afford to stay here as well.

FANNY : I could manage somehow.

EDITH : Manage indeed ! You never manage anything—you leave it all to me. I do think you're being too utterly selfish over this ! What fun do you think it'll be for me alone with Travers and her eternal grievances ?

FANNY : Well, you arranged to meet her.

EDITH : One must be decent to the poor old thing—and it won't be so bad if there are two of us. It's no use, Fanny, you're just being ridiculous. You know you've always been keener on seeing Venice than anywhere.

FANNY : I know. I'm still keen.—Perhaps we could just manage it next year.

EDITH : Even if I could, you couldn't. I shall have to do something for my sister next year—I shan't be able to help you again. It's taken me all my time this year.

FANNY : Oh, I know you've been most awfully good—I suppose it's selfish of me to want my own way after you've been so generous.

EDITH : You know I've been only too glad to be able to help you. But, honestly, I do think you're being selfish over this. And you're so impressionable—once you've seen Venice you'll want to spend the rest of your life there. Think of all the galleries and churches ! You'll love it.

FANNY (*half-heartedly*) : I suppose so.

EDITH : Anyhow, it's not a question of being selfish—the whole thing's impossible. You can't go dashing about the Continent alone—you know what a fool you are at travelling—and I'm certainly not coming back for you. And now, for goodness' sake, let's go to bed. I'm tired out.

FANNY : All right—I won't be a minute. Put the light out and I'll slip in without waking you.

EDITH : But why do you want to stay out here at all ?

FANNY : Just to say my prayers to the stars.

EDITH : What a baby you are ! All right—but don't be long. (*She goes in, leaving the window open, although the curtains are drawn.*)

[*Left alone, FANNY leans on the rail of the balcony and stares straight in front of her. After a few*

*seconds the light behind her is turned out. She gives a little sigh and closes her eyes. Her lips move in prayer. The window leading on to the other balcony opens, and STEINER is seen at it. He stands looking at her a moment before he steps on to the balcony.*

STEINER (*very softly*) : Fräulein Fanny——

FANNY (*with a gasp*) : Oh ! Oh, you startled me !

STEINER : I am so sorry. I spoke very softly.

FANNY : I—I didn't know that was your room.

STEINER : It is not—here is only a landing. The friend is asleep ?

FANNY : No, not yet, I think.

STEINER : Then close the window—it is not kind to disturb her.

FANNY : Oh, but I mustn't stay. (*But as she speaks she does as he suggests.*)

STEINER : You are tired ?

FANNY : No—but——

STEINER : Or cold ?

FANNY : No.

STEINER : Then stay a while. It is yet so early—not ten o'clock.

FANNY : Why did you come ?

STEINER : Perhaps I, too, wish to say good-night to the stars.

FANNY : But you could see them from the garden or the road.

STEINER : But they are specially nice ones here.—Look, there is a—what do you call it in English ?

FANNY : A shooting star.

STEINER : A shooting star. Did you wish ?

FANNY : Yes.

STEINER : I, too. Perhaps we wish the same wish. If we did, it will come true.

FANNY : I don't suppose we did. And, anyhow, mine won't come true. (*She sighs.*) Oh, how I wish that Edith loved the mountains as I do.

STEINER : Now I know we wished the same wish. Miss Fanny, why do you not stay here ?

FANNY : Edith won't hear of it. She's dying to get to Venice.

STEINER : Then let her get to Venice—but you stay here.

FANNY : I can't. You see, I don't earn very much money. She—she's helped me to pay for this holiday.

STEINER : You mean you cannot afford to stay here ? Will you not be our guest ?

FANNY : Oh, I couldn't. Besides, it isn't so much that. It's just that it would spoil everything for her. I can't do that—she's been so good to me.

STEINER : I see. It makes it difficult. I wish she could get just a little ill in the night, so that when she wake up she say, " I cannot go to-day."

FANNY : But that's wicked. You mustn't wish that.

STEINER : Oh, I do not mean anything bad—just a little illness. Perhaps she sprain her ankle.

FANNY : What, in the night ?

STEINER (*laughing*) : I know it is not easy. Ah, Miss Fanny, I am quite wicked. I do not care what happens to her if only you stay. You are not like anyone who ever came here.

FANNY : But I'm so ordinary.

STEINER : Ach, no. There is a magic with you. When first you came this morning, I hardly saw



you—just a little brown lady with a quiet voice. But when you take the glasses off you are quite different—like someone in a fairy-tale.

FANNY : I'm too old to be in a fairy-tale.

STEINER : You will never be old. You are imprisoned in the spring. It is all round you. Can you not smell lilac ?

FANNY : Perhaps it is my scent—some I got in Paris.

STEINER : Let me smell. (*She leans over the balcony, holding out her handkerchief.*) Ach, no, it is not that. That is not even like you. It is the ghosts of lilac that I smell. In the spring there is a big white bush under this window. You have bewitched it, and it blooms again.

FANNY (*looking down into the garden*) : I can almost see it. How wonderful it must be here in the spring.

STEINER : It is most marvellous—fields and fields of flowers, and the air is like wine. Even now, when you are high above the world, there comes a lightness in your heart.—Would you not like to climb the mountains ?

FANNY : Oh, I would !—But I don't suppose I ever could.

STEINER : With me you would be quite safe. We would put some nails in the silly shoes. There is a meadow high on the Himmelsberg where we would climb—and you should sing your song.

FANNY : What song ?

STEINER : The song about the shepherdess—but there are no sheep, only the ringing of cow-bells from the valley.

FANNY : How lovely.

STEINER : Will you not come with me just for one day ?

FANNY : Oh, if only I could ! I've always longed to be in the mountains. There's a picture in our rooms at Eccles—only a cheap print—but it shows a little village right under the hills. Often in the evenings, when I'm tired of correcting exercises, I try to get right into it—to climb from the village to the mountain-top. Then I shut my eyes, and sometimes I can imagine it all—the sunlight and the wind—and then stillness and silence and a sort of peace. Not the peace you get in churches or anywhere in the valleys—it's somehow different.

STEINER : I know. It is not the peace of the earth—it steals a little from the skies.

FANNY : Yes, that's it. But how silly of me—I'm only imagining it. I've never really been on the mountains.

STEINER : But you must. Miss Fanny, sometimes it is not right to be unselfish—it is to kill something in yourself. See, already I know you a little. Have you not always been shut in ?

FANNY : I suppose so.

STEINER : Perhaps that is why you seem so young. But now it is time to grow. The flowers that will not bloom fade in the bud.

FANNY : You mean——?

STEINER : I mean—Life does not stand still. It is so short, the time for the mountain-tops. Soon we shall be old—what will it matter then that you were kind to the friend ?

FANNY : Will anything matter then ?

STEINER : I think so—some memories will last. To look back on the sweetness of youth—it is to hope for Heaven. To regret its waste is just to wait for death. (*For a moment he is imprisoned in this thought, which has come to him for the first time. Then he breaks away from it and speaks gaily to*

FANNY.) But, see, we are still young. Will you not climb the mountains while you may?

FANNY : You make it seem wrong to leave them.

STEINER : It is wrong—not to take the little gifts life offers. Sometimes she is not so generous. Think how long you will be shut in the dull town, while here there is a little freedom. I think that is a rare thing for you. (*He watches her for a moment, and then says very softly*) I think you will stay?

[*Before FANNY can reply, EDITH's voice is heard.*

EDITH (*calling*) : Fanny !

FANNY (*opening the window a few inches to reply*) : I'm just coming. (*Closes window and turns to STEINER.*) I must go now.

STEINER : But you will stay to-morrow?

FANNY : Oh, I don't know—I must—I—I'll talk to Edith again in the morning.

STEINER : That is no good. You must make your own mind up.

FANNY : I want to stay so much——

[*EDITH calls again.*

Anon, anon, nurse. (*She says this very softly, and then breaks into a little school-girlish laugh.*)

STEINER : What did you say?

FANNY : You wouldn't understand. I'm very silly—just something from a play. (*Again she is overcome with stifled laughter.*) I don't know what's happened to me to-night—I feel light-headed. I think it's the air.

STEINER : Ah, Miss Fanny, you shall laugh on the mountains. Listen, I have an idea. Why do you not get up early and climb a little way? Then you will see how lovely it is, how right it is for you to stay.

FANNY : Oh yes, that would be wonderful.

STEINER : You could climb to the first shrine on the Himmelsberg. That would not take you long.

FANNY : Where is it ?

STEINER : Look, you can see it from here—the little light, always it burns.

FANNY : But that must be miles away.

STEINER : No—or you would not see the light. It is not much more than half an hour away. There is a little path that leads from the meadows—you will take it ?

FANNY : I will, I will—oh, how lovely. At least I shall have that to remember. What time is it light ?

STEINER : At six. But you must not start till the sun is up. It is too cold. Start at seven ; even then it is chilly. I will leave a big warm shawl at your door.

[EDITH *calls again.*

FANNY (*softly*) : I come, I come. (*Again she giggles.*)

STEINER : You are so gay, Miss Fanny. I am sure you will stay.

[*The sound of a piano being played is faintly heard.*

FANNY : Oh, I don't know—I feel quite mad. I must go now.

STEINER : Listen—Miss Audrey is playing—can you hear ?

FANNY : Yes—it's Grieg's Cradle Song.

STEINER : She often plays it.—A cradle song for Fanny—but do not sleep too long. I am afraid you will not wake in time.

FANNY : I always wake when it's light—even if I go to sleep again.



[EDITH calls.

What would she say if she knew I was talking to you ?

STEINER : But it is most respectable—see, I cannot even touch your hand—can I ? (*Holds his hand out.*)

FANNY : I—I don't know. (*She holds her hand across the space between the balconies—their finger-tips just touch. She draws her hand away quickly.*) Good-night. I must go now.

STEINER : Yes, it is better now.—But look—the little shrine is waiting for you in the morning. Good-night.

[*With a whispered " Good-night " she goes. For a moment STEINER stands looking at her window, while the Cradle Song continues. Then he stretches his arms out wide, not because he is tired, but in an intense appreciation of the beauty of life—though he, himself, would be the last to analyse the meaning of his gesture. He smiles very happily, and goes in. The music continues after the curtain has fallen.*

## END OF SCENE 2 (ACT II)

### SCENE 3

SCENE : *Before a shrine on the mountain. It is early morning, and the sky is clear and pale. Although the sun is up, it is behind the mountains, so that some of the mystery of dawn remains.*

*On the right is a narrow path, leading from the valley ; on the left the hill slopes steeply upwards, covered with small boulders and grass. Half-way up the incline is a shrine, with a smiling Virgin and*

*Child ; a lamp burns above them, pale in the clear daylight. A distant cow-bell sounds from below and is heard at intervals throughout the scene.*

*When the curtain rises, FANNY is sitting a few feet below the shrine, wrapped in a large and very beautiful peasant shawl, white, with a coloured border. Her dress, too, is white, and at her waist she has pinned some of the autumn crocuses. She is wearing her pince-nez and is reading. A few moments elapse, during which she turns a page. Then she smiles, gives a small and happy sigh, and looks straight out to the sky. Suddenly, her ears detect a sound from below, and she peers over the mountain-side. Then she closes her book, takes off her pince-nez, and arranges the shawl round her. After a moment, STEINER climbs up on to the path.*

STEINER : Good morning, Miss Fanny.

FANNY (*shyly*) : Good morning.

STEINER : So you did not sleep too long ? You found your way quite easy ?

FANNY : Yes.

STEINER : And you were not too cold ?

FANNY : Oh no—not with the shawl. Thank you for leaving it for me.

STEINER : You look so nice in it—I think you should always wear it. (*He throws himself down on the slope, just below her, and laughs happily.*)

FANNY : Why do you laugh ?

STEINER : I don't know.

FANNY : But there must be some reason ?

STEINER : Must there ? All right—I find one. (*He thinks a moment.*) I laugh because it is morning and the sun is climbing—because the air is so sweet—and because Miss Fanny is wearing a big white shawl. Is that enough reasons ?

FANNY : I suppose so. (*She, too, laughs.*)

STEINER : Now you laugh. (*Shakes his finger at her with mock severity.*) What are your reasons ?

FANNY : I haven't any.

STEINER : Then I must make them for you. I think you laugh because you are so high above the world and can look down on the village, still in its Sunday sleep—like in the picture at your home, is it not so ? And because you have run away all by yourself—and because you have made up your mind to let the friend go to Venice alone while you stay here with us.

FANNY : Oh, but I haven't made up my mind—not quite.

STEINER : But nearly ? When I see you go this morning so early, I say to myself, "I will give her just half an hour on the mountains, and she will find it so lovely that she cannot leave it—and then I will climb up and get her promise."

FANNY : Promise ?

STEINER : Oh yes, you must promise. If not, the friend will make you change your mind. At first she will be cross, and then she will be sad, and you will feel you cannot be so unkind, and you will go with her.

FANNY : You must think me very weak-minded.

STEINER : Ach, no. Just—gentle-minded. think you do not often have your own way. Tell me about your life in England.

FANNY : There isn't much to tell. Edith and I live together.

STEINER : In a little house ?

FANNY : Oh, no, just in furnished rooms. They're quite comfortable, but rather ugly and dark. But, then, we're not in them much in the daytime.

STEINER : What time do you go to work ?

FANNY : School opens at nine, but we have to leave the house soon after eight—there's a long tram ride. That's horrid. The trams are always packed, and people tread on you—and it's so difficult to stand when you're carrying lots of exercise-books.

STEINER : Can you not walk to school ?

FANNY : It's not a very nice walk—and so often it's raining. And Edith doesn't like walking.

STEINER : I see. And when you get to school ?

FANNY : There are prayers—and classes.

STEINER : The children—they are nice ?

FANNY : Yes, some of them are sweet—I have the very little ones, you know. But just when you're getting fond of them they move on to other classes.

STEINER : You do not see them any more ?

FANNY : Only for singing—I teach that till they're quite big.

STEINER : You like that ?

FANNY : Ye-es. Though sometimes the big girls are rude and difficult to manage. It's nicest with the babies. We have little singing games—they're fun.

STEINER : And do the little ones teach you or you teach them ?

FANNY : Now you're making fun of me—though, really, they're very quick ; often they remember things I forget.

STEINER (*laughing at her*) : I am sure they do.—And after school, what do you do then—enjoy yourself ?

FANNY : Often on Saturdays we go to theatres or concerts—there are very good ones in Manchester—but in the week-time there's too much to do—home-work to correct and lessons to prepare.



STEINER : I see.—And the other mistresses—they are nice ?

FANNY : They're rather old—but very kind. Sometimes they ask us to tea on Saturdays.

STEINER (*politely*) : How nice. But are they all old ?

FANNY : The games mistresses are generally young, but they never seem to stop long. The one we have now is very pretty, but she hasn't much time for me. She's very modern.

STEINER : And you are not modern ?

FANNY : Oh no.

STEINER : Old-fashioned ?

FANNY : I don't think I'm anything really.

STEINER : I think you are many things—all of them most nice. (*Smiles up at her.*) But go on—what do you do on Sundays ? Can you walk into the country ?

FANNY : Not in Manchester—you'd have to take a train. And we're generally rather tired. I'm afraid we don't do anything much but read—and sometimes somebody comes to tea.

STEINER : You have many friends ?

FANNY : Only the other mistresses.

STEINER : No men friends ?

FANNY : No, none.

STEINER : What, none at all ?

FANNY : No. Oh, there's the vicar.

STEINER : He is nice ?

FANNY : Very nice. But he's going to retire this year—he's nearly seventy.

STEINER : But in the holidays—you go home ?

FANNY : I haven't any home.

STEINER : Your father and mother ?

FANNY : My mother died when I was little and my father when I was twenty-two. That's why I have to earn my living—he only left me forty pounds a year.

STEINER : You have no other relations ?

FANNY : Only distant cousins. And our head-mistress—she was a cousin of my mother's. That's why she gave me the work. It was very good of her—I haven't any qualifications.

STEINER : And the friend, Miss Gunter—how long have you known her ?

FANNY : Oh, for—for ages. She has a mother and sisters, and often I stay with them in the holidays. They've been very good to me.

STEINER : I see. And you are—happy in your life ?

FANNY : I suppose so. The time just passes. And then there are the summer holidays—they're wonderful. I used not to be able to afford to do much, but the last few years Edith's helped me. The year before last we went to Ireland, and last year to France, and——

STEINER : And this year you have come to Tyrol, to climb the mountains. Look, see the cross behind you, up at the top ? To-morrow we will be there.

FANNY (*turns to look up the hill so that she is half kneeling*) : But could I really climb there ?

STEINER (*putting out his hand to steady FANNY's book, which her movement has displaced*) : Oh yes, with me—it is not very difficult. (*He sees that she is now looking at the shrine.*) Is she not sweet ? Always she smiles.

FANNY : She's lovely. I'm afraid I don't like

all the crucifixes about the roads—they hurt you. But she's so happy.

STEINER : I think you are a little like her.

FANNY : Oh no.

STEINER : Yes, when you play with your little ones, I think ; when you are happy. You are happy now ?

FANNY : Very happy.

*[They smile at each other and, for once, FANNY's eyes do not fall before his ; but he, suddenly aware that the sympathy between them has grown too intimate, looks quickly away. His manner changes. He is as gay as ever, but the tender note is no longer in his voice. He still has his hand on FANNY's book, and now turns his attention to it.]*

STEINER : You were reading when I came ? Shakespeare ! I have seen one of his plays in England, but I cannot remember it very well. It was Juliet and Romeo. There was a balcony—ach—now I remember ! Was that why you laughed last night ?

FANNY : What do you mean ?

STEINER : When the nurse call. You said it was some play.

FANNY : I was just being silly.

STEINER : But Romeo was not on a balcony, was he ?

FANNY : No, of course not.

STEINER : And you are not like Juliet. She talked and talked and I did not understand one word. And me for Romeo ! *(He stands up, convulsed with laughter.)* I am too fat.

FANNY *(also rising)* : You're not fat.

STEINER *(turning away from her as he brushes the sand from his knees)* : Oh yes, I am—my wife say I am twice so fat as when she married me.

FANNY (*aghast*) : Your wife !

STEINER : Why, yes. (*Turns and sees her face.*)  
What is the matter ? (*Takes a quick step up to her.*)

FANNY : Nothing. I—I turned giddy. The air—we're so high——

STEINER : But we are not high enough to——  
(*She sways, and he takes her arm to steady her, looking anxiously at her face. And there, suddenly, he reads the truth.*) You did not know that I was married ?

FANNY : No. (*Faintly*) I——

STEINER : But I introduced my wife to you yesterday—ach no, the soup boil over. But you have seen her—she served the dinner with me.

FANNY : The—the one in buttoned boots ?

STEINER : I think her boots do button, but——

FANNY : I didn't know. She's always in the kitchen——

STEINER : I told you—the servants have gone. But always she does the cooking—she likes to, just as I like to wait on my guests. You—you thought she was a servant ?

FANNY (*desperately*) : I didn't think anything.

STEINER : But I cannot understand—everyone knows her—it is Frau Steiner here, Frau Steiner there—all the time people talk to her.

FANNY : We've only been here a little while, and I understand so little German. (*With a pitiful effort to pass the matter away.*) It doesn't matter, anyhow.

STEINER : But it does matter ! Ach, I have been mad ! You thought that——

FANNY (*stopping him frantically*) : No, no, please——



I didn't think anything. I was surprised, that's all—and the air—getting up so early—I——  
(*She feels the last remnants of control are slipping from her.*) I think I'll go back. (*She takes a step down the hill.*)

STEINER (*very quietly, watching her closely*) : All right. And you will stay with us ?

FANNY : No ! (*Realises she is giving herself away.*)  
I mean, I——

STEINER : So that is how much it matters. (*He looks at her with complete understanding.*) Sit down, dear Fanny. (*He puts his hand on her arm, and very gently forces her to sit, kneeling close to her but on a slightly lower level.*)

FANNY (*with drooping head*) : I'm so ashamed.

STEINER : You think I do not care ?

FANNY (*raising her head, she looks, more than asks the words*) : Do you ?

STEINER : Very, very much.

FANNY : You mean—you're just sorry for me ?

STEINER (*simply*) : I love you.

FANNY (*almost automatically she puts her arms out to him, but instantly draws back*) : No—no—your wife—it's wrong——

STEINER (*smiling*) : I know. It is quite wrong. But it has happened.

FANNY : When did you know ?

STEINER : Only just now—a minute ago. It is still so new I am quite light in the head.

FANNY (*pitifully anxious*) : You're quite sure ?

STEINER : So sure. And you, Fanny, when did you know ?

FANNY : Always.

STEINER : Always ?

FANNY : Oh, I know it sounds silly, but I feel as if I'd always known.

STEINER : It is so at home in your heart ? (*Looks wonderingly at her.*) Fanny, you are so strange, so like a child, a flower—I am afraid.

FANNY : Afraid ?

STEINER : Afraid to kiss you.

[FANNY raises her face to him ; very slowly he bends forward to kiss her, but suddenly she draws back.

FANNY : No ! (*She springs to her feet and fends him off with her hands, although he does not make any attempt to touch her.*) No !

STEINER : Fanny ! (*He also has risen.*)

FANNY : Please don't touch me. Oh, don't you understand ? It's wrong—it's wicked—your wife—— Oh, why did you tell me ? Why didn't you let me go ?

STEINER : I could not—when I saw you cared for me——

FANNY : But what is there for us ? Oh, I don't understand—you're good and kind and yet you let this happen. Why did you come last night ?

STEINER : To the balcony ? I wanted to see you.

FANNY : But you didn't even love me then.

STEINER : Perhaps I did. No. Fanny, sit down—you cannot go back like this. (*Gently compelled by him, she sits, and he beside her.*) Listen, I will try to tell you all the truth. When you came yesterday I thought you were most sweet ; I wanted to be with you, to talk to you—I did not think how much. Always I am happy with my guests—and with you, more happy. And then last night—the music—you sang—suddenly it was more than just liking you. I felt I could not let you go away——

FANNY : But what did you think could happen ?

STEINER (*rising and desperately striving to explain himself*) : I did *not* think. One does not always think—one just lives. What did *you* think, Fanny ? Did you say, “ Here is a man I love—we will be married ” ?

FANNY : Oh no—I just wanted to be with you.

STEINER : You see ! One does not always think. Fanny, I am not bad—I did not plan it—I did not say, “ When we are on the mountains I will make love to her——”

FANNY : You thought we could be friends ?

STEINER : I *did* not think—each minute was a magic to itself.

FANNY : But last night, when you left me——?

STEINER : I just slept.

FANNY (*sadly*) : I see.

STEINER : No, Fanny, you do not. You think that it was wrong of me not to have known you would mind so much. Perhaps it was not wrong, but stupid. I wish I could explain, but I am bad at looking inside my mind—and I am so afraid to hurt you——

FANNY : Hurt me ?

STEINER (*kneeling close to her*) : You see, if you had been German, I would have known. No German girl—no sweet girl like you—would so have talked to a man she knew was married. But the English are so different—see, there is Miss Audrey, so nice, but she does not think it matters to marry—and there have been others here, always so free. Last year there was one lady, a widow—we were a little friendly—a walk or two—and—how shall I say it?—she wished me to make love to her.

FANNY : You thought I was like that ?

STEINER : No, no ! But, because of all these, I thought you did not mind about my wife.

FANNY : Did you make love to the widow ?

STEINER : No—only a very little. Do I make you understand ? You were not like them—Miss Audrey or any of the others—but because of them I did not take enough care of you. Do you forgive me ?

FANNY (*quietly*) : Yes. (*She rises.*)

STEINER (*springing up*) : Where are you going ?

FANNY : Back to the hotel. I must go away.

STEINER : Go away ?

FANNY : What else is there ? I love you ; I shall always love you ; but what can I do but go ?

STEINER : Stay here with me.

FANNY : Now ?

STEINER : More than ever now.

FANNY : You mean we can be friends ?

STEINER : No.

FANNY : Then——

STEINER : We love each other——

FANNY : But your wife——

STEINER : She need never know. (*They stand looking at each other, and he sees an understanding which is almost fear dawn in her eyes.*) Fanny, you are so—so untouched, it is hard to talk to you. But I must.—To-day you have told me something of your life. I say it is not a life—no joy, no colour. What I ask of you perhaps is wrong, but it is life. And I do not think it is wrong—not for us. It would be too beautiful. (*FANNY makes a slight sound and sways. He quickly takes her arm to steady her.*) You are so young—I think it is because you have never lived—but one day you



will grow old. You tell me you are twenty-nine——

FANNY : It isn't true. I'm older. I'm thirty-five. (*Almost blindly she turns away from him and sinks on to the grass.*)

STEINER : Fanny ! (*With an instant desire to show his sympathy and understanding, he flings himself to the ground, his head against her knees. After a moment, he looks up at her wonderingly.*) It is scarcely possible ! (*For a moment he continues to look at her, then he speaks eagerly.*) When is your birthday ?

FANNY (*her head still averted*) : June.

STEINER : Then still am I older than you—three months ! (*He laughs happily.*) Oh, Fanny, Fanny, what does it matter—what does anything matter—if we love each other ? (*He draws her to her feet and towards him.*)

FANNY : But we shouldn't—I oughtn't to let you——

STEINER : You do not have to let me. (*He takes her in his arms and smiles at her, then kisses her. After the kiss she leans her head against his shoulder for a moment, then suddenly becomes vaguely uneasy at the thought of being kissed under the eyes of the Virgin in the shrine. She turns towards it, still in his arms.*) See, she is still smiling. She does not mind. Ach—I have crushed your flowers——

FANNY : It doesn't matter. What are they called ?

STEINER : Herbstzeitlose, the timeless flower.—And in English ?

FANNY : I think they're autumn crocuses—they're like the ones we have in spring.

STEINER : They are like you, Fanny—the flower of spring that blooms in autumn. Let us be happy in this dear September spring.

FANNY : We haven't the right to be happy.

STEINER : Oh, Fanny, Fanny, how can you love and not be happy ?

FANNY : But there's your wife—she'd mind. Would she divorce you if she found out ?

STEINER : There is no divorce in our Church—besides, she would not wish it. She would be sorry—yes—but she would know it makes no difference to our life here.

FANNY : No difference ?

STEINER : To our good friendship and our work together. And then there is the little Lenchen.

FANNY : The little girl—your daughter ?

STEINER : But of course.

FANNY : It's so strange to me. Somehow I can't associate you with—your wife seems so unlike you——

STEINER : But you have scarcely met her. To-day you will see her in our national dress—always she wears it for church. She has many fine dresses and shawls.

FANNY (*with a sudden aversion to the shawl she is wearing*) : Is this hers ?

STEINER : No, no—that was my mother's. It is for you, Fanny. You shall take it back to England when you go, and when you wear it you shall think of me.

FANNY (*smiling*) : I couldn't wear it in England.

STEINER : Not in the day. But at night, when you are alone, you shall wrap it round you, so—(*he drapes it round her*)—and think of the time when you will be back with me.

FANNY : Come back ?

STEINER : But of course. You did not think I

could let you go away for ever ? I have a plan : every spring you shall come to me—and every autumn you shall bring the spring back again.

FANNY : I could never afford——

STEINER : But I am quite rich. Oh, Fanny, Fanny, you must not be proud—not if you love me. (*Kneels beside her, but on slightly higher ground so that his head is level with her shoulder. The clear grey of the sky is now flushed with gold.*) Look, the sun is climbing over the mountains there—will you not sing your song ? See, I remember it—“ How gloriously the sun does shine ”——

FANNY (*gazing straight into the sunrise, she takes up the song, her face and voice exalted*) : “ How pleasant is the air ; I’d sooner rest on my true love’s breast than any other where. (STEINER’S *head sinks on to her breast.*) For thou art mine and I am thine, no man shall uncomfot thee ; we’ll join our hands in true love’s bands and married we will be——” (*She breaks off, in tears.*) You see, it isn’t true, it isn’t true.

STEINER (*comforting her*) : Fanny—dear Fanny—sweet Fanny—I am so sorry—I did not remember. But it is the same if we love each other—I will make it the same. Do not cry.

FANNY : I’m sorry—I’m just silly—you see, I’ve never loved anyone before, and now—— (*She dries her tears.*) Leave me a little while by myself—to think.

STEINER : But you will not change your mind—you will stay ?

FANNY : Yes, I’ll stay.

STEINER : Then I will leave you, if you wish it. Dear, dear Fanny.

FANNY : What is *your* name—your Christian name ?

STEINER : You do not know it ? (*She shakes her head.*) Andreas.

FANNY (*repeating it carefully*) : Andreas—is that right ?

STEINER : It sounds most sweet. (*Stands looking at her.*) It is so hard to leave you, Fanny.

FANNY : I shall soon come back.

STEINER : Till then, *auf wiedersehen*. (*He is about to kiss her, but suddenly stoops and kisses her hand instead.*)

FANNY : *Auf wiedersehen*.

[*After one last look at her, he climbs down the little path and out of sight. She watches him for a minute and then turns to climb the hill. Her glance turns involuntarily to the shrine, and she sees that the flowers in the vase at the Virgin's feet are dead. She replaces them with the autumn crocuses which are pinned to her dress. She stands back and looks at the shrine for a moment, then she sinks to her knees, smiling at the smiling Virgin. The white shawl trails behind her on the grass. From the valley comes the sound of a solitary cow-bell.*]

END OF SCENE 3 (ACT II)



## ACT III

SCENE : *The same as Act I. The living-room of the Rote Hirsch is flooded with sunlight and Sunday peace.*

*When the curtain rises, ALARIC is seated at the left end of the long centre table, with a number of books in front of him, from which he is making notes. AUDREY is at the other end of the table, reading and munching an apple. Both of them are wearing their spectacles. After a few moments' silence AUDREY gives a snort of laughter.*

ALARIC : For goodness' sake shut up, woman. That's the third time you've laughed in the last five minutes.

AUDREY (*without looking up*) : Well, it's funny.

ALARIC : I daresay—but there's nothing more irritating than listening to someone gurgling over a book you're not reading.

AUDREY : But you've read it.

ALARIC : I know I have, but I'm not reading it now. You ought to laugh inwardly.

AUDREY (*her eyes still on her book*) : Can't. It hurts. (*A moment's silence, and then she explodes again.*)

ALARIC : Curse it ! (*Then, with the possessive pride of having read the book first.*) Where've you got to ?

AUDREY : The grandmother's funeral.

ALARIC : Oh, well, of course that is very funny. (*He laughs reminiscently.*) Have they dropped the coffin yet ?

AUDREY : They're just going to. (*She reads a few more lines, and then roars with laughter.*) Oh, these Russians !

ALARIC : Aren't they marvellous? And the next minute they're completely harrowing—the depths of self-exploration.

AUDREY : Yes, but I'm not so awfully keen on them when they start delving in each other's souls. (*She puts the book down and takes a bite of apple.*)

[EDITH comes downstairs.]

(*With her mouth full.*) Good morning. Didn't see you at breakfast.

EDITH : No—I overslept.

AUDREY : I should think you did—it's nearly twelve.

EDITH : I have been awake several hours—packing.

AUDREY : Oh, I see. Fancy spending several hours packing a suitcase.

EDITH : I had to pack Miss Gray's for her, too. I suppose you haven't seen her anywhere?

AUDREY : No ; she wasn't at breakfast, either.

EDITH : She left a note saying she was going out early for a walk. But really she ought to be back by this time. The 'bus goes in half an hour.

AUDREY : Perhaps she's lost.

ALARIC : Or twisted her ankle. She doesn't look as if she'd be much of a hand at mountaineering.

EDITH : I can hardly believe she'd be foolish enough to go far—but really, after her talk last night——

ALARIC : What talk?

EDITH : Oh, nothing really. But she seemed to have fallen in love with the mountains.

AUDREY : Hmm ! Well, there's a very distinct attraction about—the mountains. I've noticed it myself. (*She exchanges a glance with ALARIC.*)

EDITH : I really am getting anxious. I wonder if someone would go and look for her ? Perhaps Herr Steiner—— (*She makes a step towards the kitchen.*)

AUDREY : It's no use going to the kitchen. Everyone's at church.

EDITH : Everyone ?

ALARIC : Everyone. Herr Steiner, Frau Steiner and the little Steiner—and the one remaining domestic.

EDITH : But who's looking after the inn ?

AUDREY : We are—and, anyhow, it doesn't need any looking after. All the villagers are at church, and there's no 'bus till 12.30.

ALARIC : And if there should be an unexpected call from the bar, Audrey's a great hand at pouring out beer.

AUDREY : Alaric's an equally good hand at pouring it in.

ALARIC : What a low joke—almost a pun.

AUDREY : Lots of great brains like puns.

EDITH (*breaking in*) : I wonder, then, if I might ask you, Mr. Craven, to have a look for Miss Gray ?

ALARIC : Certainly. Where would you like me to start ? Just outside the front door there are three mountains to choose from.

EDITH : I suppose it is rather hopeless.

AUDREY : Cheer up, she'll turn up soon.

EDITH : But, if we miss this 'bus, we shall lose our train in Innsbruck. Oh, dear ! (*She crosses to door and looks out, then comes back.*) If Miss Gray does come in, would you or your husband be kind enough to tell her to come straight up to me ?

AUDREY : Certainly. But that isn't my husband.

EDITH : But I thought——

AUDREY : I daresay you did. Many people do. But he's only an experiment.

ALARIC : Audrey is equally an experiment with me, of course.

EDITH (*looking from one to the other*) : Oh, I see. Well, I suppose it's no affair of mine.

ALARIC : None whatever.

AUDREY : But we thought we'd just to tell you——no false pretences, you know.

EDITH (*embarrassed but not very interested*) : Yes——well——yes. You'll tell Miss Gray when she comes in ?

ALARIC : Certainly.

AUDREY : We make a point of telling everyone.

EDITH : I mean, that I'm waiting for her upstairs.

AUDREY : Oh, that. Yes, we'll tell her.

[EDITH *goes upstairs*.

Are you quite sure Herr Steiner's in church ?

ALARIC : Well, he went with the rest of the family. Why ?

AUDREY : I just thought he, too, might have fallen in love with the mountains.

ALARIC : Good Lord ! You don't mean——

AUDREY : Only that he seemed rather smitten with our pretty little school-marm.

ALARIC : Really ? But, even so, surely she wouldn't——

AUDREY : Oh yes, she would. There are very few women who wouldn't, if our charming



Andreas took a fancy to them. He's very attractive—and the clothes give him an unfair advantage.

ALARIC : I'm wearing practically the same clothes.

AUDREY : Yes, dear, but with such a difference.

ALARIC : Look here, are you really attracted by the fellow ?

AUDREY : Rather ! Thrilled to the marrow. (*She rises, very much amused at this small outburst of jealousy on Alaric's part.*) But don't worry. (*Sits on table close to him.*) He isn't at all attracted by me, so there's no fear of shattering the sanctity of our—experiment. (*She ruffles his hair.*) Funny face.

ALARIC : Don't be an ass.

[MISS MAYNE comes downstairs.]

MISS MAYNE (*beaming on them*) : Good morning.

ALARIC : Oh, hello.

AUDREY : How are you ?

MISS MAYNE : Quite better, thank you !

AUDREY : Good. Had any breakfast ?

MISS MAYNE : Yes, thank you. Frau Steiner kindly sent it up to me.

ALARIC : I expect you're a bit stiff ?

MISS MAYNE : Well, not so very—considering. In fact, I rather thought of going for another little climb this afternoon.

ALARIC : Bravo !

MISS MAYNE : Only this time I shan't take any short cuts.—You know, I do really feel I owe everyone an apology for last night.

AUDREY } simultaneously { Not at all.  
ALARIC } { Of course not.

MISS MAYNE : Oh, but my brother tells me that I was—well, of course, I'm not very clear about it, but I suppose that makes it even worse—I—I wasn't—intoxicated, was I ?

ALARIC : Good Lord, no.

AUDREY : Of course you weren't.

MISS MAYNE : Well, Edward says—and I certainly do remember feeling rather odd——

AUDREY : Anyone would if they were given a drink on an empty stomach.

MISS MAYNE : Yes, wouldn't they ? And my—I was very empty—nothing since lunch but a glass of beer.—Do you know, Edward doesn't think I ought to drink beer ? He's most upset about it.

ALARIC : Nonsense. Everyone drinks beer here.

MISS MAYNE : That's what I said—everyone. Besides, I liked it.

AUDREY : You jolly well drink what you like.

MISS MAYNE : Oh, well, I wouldn't go as far as that. (*Wanders over to letter-rack.*) Do you happen to know if a parcel's come for me ?

ALARIC : There was something by the nine o'clock 'bus—but I don't know if it's for you.

MISS MAYNE (*finding it on STEINER's table*) : Here it is—it must be my things. It isn't addressed, though.

AUDREY : I expect it's all right. Open it and see.

MISS MAYNE : I think perhaps I will. (*Does so, and holds out a pair of Tyrolean trousers.*) Good gracious ! Surely there's some mistake !

AUDREY : It does look rather like it.

MISS MAYNE : Surely, Herr Steiner couldn't have confused—I mean, his English really is

very good, isn't it? I expect it's just an accident. (*Wraps trousers up again.*) Dear me, it makes life very difficult. I've scarcely any clothes at all.

AUDREY : Let me lend you some. I've bushels of things.

MISS MAYNE : That's really very kind of you, and I must thank you again for the hot-water bottle ; it was a great boon.

AUDREY : Good. Have it again to-night.

MISS MAYNE : Oh, but I couldn't. You might want it.

AUDREY : I hardly ever use it—but Alaric gets a pain in his stomach sometimes.

MISS MAYNE : Does he? (*Rather embarrassed, but very much interested.*) And how is the—the adventure?

AUDREY : Adventure?

MISS MAYNE : Yes—my brother was telling me about you. Really, I think he expected me to be shocked, but, of course, I'm most interested in modern ideas. Not that I get the chance of hearing many. No one in our village ever does anything modern.

AUDREY : Don't they?

MISS MAYNE : Well, not on purpose. I mean, it's only—well, by accident—one just rescues them, you know. But you, of course, don't want to be rescued.

ALARIC : Well, not from ourselves.

MISS MAYNE : No, of course not—my brother tells me you are doing it all from a sense of duty. (*Regretfully*) No one in our village has any sense of duty—I mean that sort. If they have, I never get to hear of it, with being the vicar's sister ; but, then, I suppose I hardly should, you know—living at the vicarage——

AUDREY : Have an apple.

MISS MAYNE : Thank you, no. I was just going into the garden for a while before lunch—and they attract the wasps, don't they ? I suppose there aren't any English books here, are there ?

AUDREY : Well, we could lend you something—but most of ours are rather advanced.

MISS MAYNE : Oh, but I like advanced books.

ALARIC (*handing her one*) : This is fairly light.

[MAYNE *enters through front door, carrying a book.*

MAYNE : Ah, there you are, Florence. I was just coming up again to see how you were.

MISS MAYNE : I'm quite well, thank you. I'm just going into the garden. These young people are kindly lending me a book.

MAYNE (*with a glance at the one he is holding*) : Oh, really, I hardly think—it's not the sort of book you'll like.

MISS MAYNE : What are you reading ?

MAYNE : I don't think you'd like that either—very technical—complexes and things——

MISS MAYNE (*to ALARIC*) : Are there complexes in mine, too ?

ALARIC : Lots of 'em.

MISS MAYNE : How interesting. I've always wanted to know what mine were.

MAYNE : Really, Florence ! Neither of the books is suitable for you.

MISS MAYNE : Then why are you reading one ?

MAYNE : Because it's my duty to keep up with modern thought—with so many young people in my charge——

MISS MAYNE : And what about my Girl Guides ?



It's no use, Edward, I shall certainly read the book—and you'd better come out and explain the bits I don't understand. (*She goes into the garden.*)

MAYNE (*looking after her anxiously*) : I say, you don't think—I mean, after her extraordinary behaviour last night, you—you don't think she's really got a complex or an inhibition, has she ?

ALARIC : Don't you worry, Mr. Mayne. No English lady who sits down on a mountain-side and cuts out her sleeves is suffering from inhibitions.

MAYNE : Well, I hope you're right. Really, after reading some of this—(*looks, with some awe, at the book he is carrying*)—I think I'll just go after her. (*He follows her into the garden.*)

ALARIC : Lord knows what we've let ourselves in for with those two.

AUDREY : She really is rather a sporty old dame. I expect she'll make the village sit up when she gets back.

ALARIC : God help those Girl Guides !

[*EDITH comes downstairs.*]

EDITH : No sign of Miss Gray ?

ALARIC : None whatever. It looks as though you'll miss that 'bus.

EDITH (*crossing to front door*) : What *can* have happened to her ? (*Bell rings in the bar.*) What's that ?

ALARIC : Sounds like a customer in the bar. Put on your best barmaid manner, Audrey.

AUDREY (*turning back on her way to the bar*) : How much do I charge for a beer ?

ALARIC : Fourpence—and mind you pocket the tip.

[*AUDREY goes into the bar.*]

EDITH (*walking up and down*) : I don't know what to do. She must be hurt or lost.

ALARIC : Wait till the Steiners are back from church—they may know which way she went. If the worse comes to the worst, we can send out search-parties.

[FANNY *appears at the door.*

EDITH : Fanny !

ALARIC : I told you she'd turn up.

EDITH : Where have you been ?

FANNY : On the mountains—I left you a note——

EDITH : Yes, but you've been gone for hours.

ALARIC : Haven't you had anything to eat ?

FANNY : Yes, I had some milk and rolls at a little inn. It was nice. (*Sits at left of table.*)

EDITH : Well, for Heaven's sake go up and get changed—the 'bus will be here in twenty minutes.

FANNY : Will it ?

[*The door of the bar opens, and AUDREY appears at it.*

AUDREY : Alaric, there's a thrilling old man here—never goes to church—and he's telling me all the scandals of the village—and my German's so weak. Do come and help me out.

ALARIC : Right. (*Picks up his notebook and goes towards bar.*) You'd better hurry, Miss Gray, the 'buses are generally pretty prompt. (*Disappears into bar with AUDREY, closing the door behind him.*)

EDITH : Fanny dear, do pull yourself together and get ready.

FANNY : I'm not going.

EDITH : Not going ?

FANNY : No.

EDITH : You really are too trying, Fanny. We went over all this last night. You know we can't stay.

FANNY : You can't. But I can—alone.

EDITH : Fanny !

FANNY : I'm sorry, Edith.

EDITH : I should think you were—springing this on me at the last minute. You know I can't possibly leave you alone—and the 'bus'll be here in a few minutes.

FANNY : Well, I can't go by that 'bus, anyhow—I haven't packed.

EDITH : I've packed for you.

FANNY : Thank you. That was nice of you. But I'm not going. I've made up my mind. This is what I've been waiting for all my life.

EDITH : What is ?

FANNY : The place—the mountains—everything.

EDITH : Fanny, I think you've gone stark, staring mad. You've never taken all this interest in mountains before.

FANNY : I've always liked mountains.

EDITH : But not to the extent of ruining our holiday—to say nothing of poor old Travers waiting for us in Venice. If it wasn't for her I'd give in to you—but as it is——

FANNY : But I don't want you to give in. I want you to join Travers.

EDITH : Thank you very much—but if I'd wanted to spend a holiday alone with Travers I could have done it before now. And what on earth can you do here by yourself ?

FANNY : Walk and climb.

EDITH : You can't alone—it's dangerous.

FANNY : Not very. Besides, I daresay someone would go with me.

EDITH : But there's no one here for you to be friendly with—and you know how miserable you are if you're alone.

FANNY : I shan't be miserable.

EDITH : Well, I shall, shut up in Venice with Travers. I can't think what's happened to you, Fanny ; you're not usually selfish like this.

FANNY : I don't mean to be selfish, Edith. It's something important to me—I *must* stay. (*She rises and walks towards the window.*)

EDITH : *Must* stay ! (*Sees shawl which FANNY carries over her arm.*) What on earth's that ?

FANNY : Just a shawl—Herr Steiner lent it to me because it was cold in the early morning on the mountains.

EDITH : Herr Steiner ? The innkeeper ? Was he on the mountains, too ?

FANNY : Yes—for a little while.

EDITH : Did you go out with him ?

FANNY : No—I just met him.

EDITH : By accident ?

FANNY : Yes—at least, not exactly. He knew I was going.

EDITH : How did he know ?

FANNY (*utterly unable to withstand EDITH's hammer-like questions*) : He—he suggested it last night.

EDITH : Why didn't you tell me ?

FANNY : I left you a note—I couldn't tell you—you were nearly asleep.

EDITH : Asleep ! Fanny, were you talking to that man on the balcony last night ?—I thought I



heard voices, but I was too sleepy to be sure. Were you, Fanny? (FANNY *does not reply.*) Were you?

FANNY : Only for a few minutes—he came out on the next balcony. (*She is beginning to show signs of distress.*)

EDITH : And you arranged to meet him on the mountains?

FANNY : No, I didn't ; he just suggested that I should go out on them——

EDITH : And then came to meet you with his wife's shawl !

FANNY : It isn't his wife's !

EDITH : Fanny ! Fanny, is this the reason that you want to stay—because of this man?

FANNY : No—no—don't cross-examine me in this way—you've no right——

EDITH : I have a right. I think you must have gone mad—talking to this man in your dressing-gown—running about the mountains with a common innkeeper——

FANNY : He's not common ! And, anyway, he's got nothing to do with it. I'm staying here because of the place.

EDITH : Fanny, don't try to bluff me—you're no good at it. You've got to tell me the truth. Did he persuade you to stay?

FANNY : No—I tell you he's got nothing to do with it. (*She is getting more and more worked up.*) Don't keep questioning me, Edith—leave me alone !

EDITH : Fanny ! Has he been making love to you?

FANNY : No ! No ! It's no use your going on—I won't answer your questions.

EDITH : You *are* answering my questions. Do you think I can't read the whole thing in your face ?

FANNY (*overcome, sinks down at the table and sobs. Incoherently*) : Don't ! Don't look at me—it's nothing to do with you—leave me alone ! You're hateful—cruel——

EDITH (*making a great effort to control her horror and emotion*) : Fanny, I don't mean to be cruel—it's just that I'm so appalled. Look, dear, pull yourself together. Let me try to help you. Tell me about it—I'll do my best to understand. (*As FANNY still sobs*) You—you've fallen in love with him—that's it, isn't it ?

FANNY (*through her tears, almost inaudible*) : Yes.

EDITH : And does he know ?

FANNY : Yes.

EDITH : And does he pretend to be in love with you ?

FANNY : It isn't pretence.

EDITH : Oh, well, perhaps he thinks he is—you're very pretty sometimes. What does he want you to do ?

FANNY (*her sobs have ceased, and she answers EDITH's questions quietly and miserably*) : Just to stay here with him.

EDITH : Do you know what that means ?

FANNY : Yes, Edith.

EDITH : You can't be—just friends with a man of his type.

FANNY : I don't want to be just friends.

EDITH : Oh, it's so horrible—to think of you, of all people ! I—I don't know what to say to you.

FANNY : Then don't say anything.

EDITH : But I must. This may ruin your life. Have you thought what it means ? You can never come back to the school.

FANNY : Why not ?

EDITH : Miss Hill would never keep you.

FANNY : You mean you'd tell ?

EDITH : No, of course not. But you'd be different—you'd even look different——

FANNY : I'd only look happy.

EDITH : You couldn't look happy with a sordid thing like that in your mind.

FANNY : It's not sordid.

EDITH : But it is ! Have you thought of the scandal here ?

FANNY : No one will know.

EDITH : Everyone will know. You can't hide anything. You'll just walk about looking happy—as you call it. And how about Frau Steiner—have you thought of her ?

FANNY : Yes, I've been thinking about her all the morning. But she won't know—she shan't—we'll hide it somehow. It isn't as if I wanted to take him from her altogether. And, anyhow, I can't help it ; it may be wicked, but it's happened. And it doesn't feel wicked to me.

EDITH : It is wicked—to her and to yourself. Oh, I can't think of it—a girl of your type and a man of his ! Oh, I know he's unusual—charming even—but you're not the same class——

FANNY : What is my class ? The daughter of a poor clergyman ! His people have been here for hundreds of years.

EDITH : It doesn't make any difference—he's a

peasant. (*Brokenly*) Fanny, hasn't our friendship meant anything to you? I'm fonder of you than anyone in the world, and if this happens I shall never be able to look at you again. It isn't that I'm narrow-minded, but it's—just unthinkable for you. Heaven knows, if it were a happy marriage I'd be glad for you, but this——!

FANNY : Don't, Edith ! Please ! Oh, I don't want to be ungrateful to you—to hurt you—but this—can't you see it's beautiful to me? You're making it ugly, sordid——

EDITH : It is sordid—not what's in your mind, but what it entails. It may be a romance to you both now, but how do you imagine he'll think of you afterwards? Just as a light woman——

FANNY : No !

EDITH : Why not? It'll be true. Think what it means—deception, stealing another woman's husband——

[FRAU STEINER, LENCHEN, and MINNA enter through the front door. They are in national dress. FRAU STEINER'S is a particularly beautiful one, and she looks very handsome. She is in a hurry, and crosses the stage with a quick “Grüss Gott” to EDITH, who stands between her and FANNY. MINNA goes straight to the kitchen, while FRAU STEINER and LENCHEN hurry upstairs.

(*Having watched LENCHEN climb the stairs—in a hushed voice*) Fanny, do you realise you might have a child?

FANNY (*gives a strange, choking moan, and puts up her hands as if to fend off EDITH'S words. Then her resistance collapses*) : All right. I'll go. You've spoilt everything——

EDITH (*nearly in tears*) : Oh, Fanny, it's for your good——



FANNY (*has turned away and is looking through the window*) : He's coming.

EDITH : Come away, dear, quickly.

FANNY : No—I must speak to him.

EDITH : You can't—now.

FANNY : I must. Oh, don't worry—I shan't change my mind.

EDITH : Promise me——

FANNY : What's the use of promising ? I promised him. But don't be anxious—you've finished everything. I think you've finished my whole life.

EDITH : Oh, my dear, don't be childish ! Will you never grow up ?

FANNY (*with bitter realisation*) : No, only old.

[EDITH takes a step towards FANNY, intending to comfort her, but suddenly sees STEINER through the open door. She stops abruptly. Then, feeling she cannot face him, she turns and rushes upstairs. FANNY crosses quickly to the right and stands with her back to the door. The tears are still on her face, and she attempts to find her handkerchief ; unable to do so, she dabs ineffectually at her cheeks with her hands. STEINER, who has not seen EDITH, comes through the front door and stands smiling. He is in his Sunday clothes. The long trousers and high collar rob him of much of his boyishness.]

STEINER : So you did not get lost ?

[FANNY turns towards him and shakes her head, unable to speak.]

(*Seeing her distracted face*) What is it ? What has happened ?

FANNY (*her voice choked with her efforts to control her tears*) : I'm going.

STEINER (*aghast*) : Fanny !

FANNY : I must.

STEINER (*goes quickly to kitchen door and shuts it, glances warily at the staircase and the door of the bar, and then comes over to FANNY*) : Now, tell me quickly, what is wrong ?

FANNY : Edith's found out—everything.

STEINER : You told her ?

FANNY : She guessed. She says everyone would guess. She's made it all ugly and sordid.

STEINER : But she cannot make it that. This morning, on the mountain, it was not ugly.

FANNY : No, that was beautiful—nothing can spoil that. But don't you see ? We couldn't be always on the mountains—we'd have to come back here—and then everyone would know.

STEINER : Why should they know ?

FANNY : Because I'm no good at hiding things—Edith's made me realise that. It would be in my eyes every time I looked at you.

STEINER (*about to take her in his arms*) : Fanny, dear Fanny——

FANNY (*drawing away*) : No, no, please don't make it more difficult. Edith's made me see it's impossible—unthinkable. But now you're here it's so hard to go.

STEINER : Then stay, dearest Fanny. Even if the other guests do suspect, what does it matter ? Miss Audrey and Mr. Craven, they will not even think it wrong, and the others, why——

FANNY : Oh, they none of them matter. But there's your wife—sooner or later she'd find out.

STEINER : I do not think so. You need hardly meet her.

FANNY : But don't you see—it isn't only that she might find out—it's *wrong*. This morning nothing seemed to matter except that I loved you. But here—it's all different—even you, in these

clothes—oh, I don't mean that they change you, but somehow—it's all *real* here. You belong to them—your wife and little girl—I could never look at them—some of the things that Edith said——

STEINER : What did she say ?

FANNY : I can't tell you—they're not true—not for us. But they would be if I stayed. I—I can't explain what I mean, but I know everything would be spoilt—there'd be nothing left. (*Her eyes implore him to interpret her incoherent thoughts for her.*)

STEINER : Fanny, I cannot understand. If I thought it was for your good to go, I would not try to keep you, but how can it be right for you to go back to that life? Never to live or share the joy of love ! You are still so young in heart, but one day you will grow old. Will you grow old with no dear memories ?

FANNY : I shall have memories ! (*For a moment her eyes shine with the light of pure happiness.*) Last night—this morning—the meadows were all misty—waiting for you, high on the mountain, with the world waking for the first time—I think I shall remember it when I am dying——

STEINER : Fanny ! (*He takes her in his arms but does not kiss her.*)

FANNY (*the glory fading from her face*) : You said there'd be mountains in Heaven—— (*She drops her head on his shoulder and cries quietly.*)

STEINER (*comforting her*) : Fanny, my dear, my heart, stay with me. It cannot be right to kill anything so lovely. I love you so much, more even than I knew this morning. Sweet, do not cry—see, I will help you, take care of you——

FANNY : No——

STEINER : Will you stay if I promise I will not make love to you ? It shall be a friendship

between us—a loving friendship. I will not even kiss you.

FANNY (*simply*) : But I should want you to. (*He is about to kiss her, but she draws away.*) No, please, not now, when it's just good-bye. This morning, when you kissed me, I was happy : I want to remember that always. (*She turns to go ; her tears have stopped, and she speaks very quietly.*)

STEINER : I cannot let you go like this. Oh, what shall I do ? (*He looks round distractedly.*) At any moment someone may come in, and I cannot make you see ! Fanny ! Fanny, listen—(*he draws her back and holds her in his arms*)—I have tried to think of you—what is best for you. Truly, I think you should stay—to live, it is the first duty of life, whatever happens—and I would take care of you—I would make it right somehow. But if you will not believe me about yourself, think for one minute of me. I love you. It is not like anything I have known before. I love my wife, too, but it is so different—just quiet and friendly. Always there has been something just beyond my life that I wanted—a dream I did not know how to dream. Fanny, it is my love for you. I did not know till now.

FANNY : Oh, don't—don't ! You're making it so hard.

STEINER : I *want* to make it hard ! Fanny, I beg you——

FANNY : I can't—I mustn't——

STEINER (*imploringly*) : Fanny !

[*The door of the bar opens and AUDREY and ALARIC come in. FANNY has broken away from STEINER's arms, and for a moment the others do not see that anything is wrong.*]

ALARIC : Oh, hello, back from church ?

AUDREY : We're doing a roaring trade in beer.

[FANNY dashes wildly upstairs.]



ALARIC (*astonished, both by FANNY's flight and STEINER's expression*) : Oh ! have we butted in at the wrong moment !

AUDREY : Shut up ! (*To STEINER*) Any signs of the Feldmanns ? They're going on the 12.30 'bus, aren't they ?

STEINER : Yes, yes—I think so. (*He makes a great effort to regain control over himself, but it is only partially successful.*) I will look for them in the garden. (*He escapes through the front door, passing his hand across his forehead as if dazed.*)

AUDREY : You are the essence of tact !

ALARIC : Well, but, hang it, I only said——

AUDREY : Just at that moment it was a crime to exist, never mind say anything. Poor Herr Steiner !

ALARIC : Well, *she* looked pretty upset. I suppose she's being hauled away by her weighty friend.

AUDREY : I wonder ? Oh, I hope she stays !

ALARIC : God ! you women are fundamentally immoral ! Here you are, wanting to see a perfectly good marriage smashed up——

[*The FELDMANNS, complete with camping paraphernalia, appear on the stairs. They have some difficulty in getting down.*]

Hello, here you are, booted and spurred.

FELDMANN : Yes, we are ready at last. We have only to pay the *Rechnung*. Where is Herr Steiner ?

AUDREY : In the garden. (*She goes to the door and calls*) Herr Steiner—shop ! (*She makes two syllables of "Shop."*)

ALARIC : We must have a farewell drink. (*Goes into the bar.*)

[*STEINER enters. His manner is more controlled, but he is still very much shaken. He sees that FELDMANN is waiting for his bill.*]

FELDMANN : Bitte, die Rechnung.

STEINER (*crossing to desk*) : Sogleich, mein Herr. (*He goes through the bills which lie beside the typewriter till he finds the right one, which he hands to FELDMANN.*)

FELDMANN (*reading bill and then settling it from a wad of notes*) : Besten Dank. Es war mir ein Vergnügen. Ich bin nirgends so zufrieden gewesen.

STEINER (*speaks the necessary words of courtesy automatically, but his thoughts are still with FANNY*) Hoffentlich kommen sie nächstes Jahr wieder, gelt ?

FRAU FELDMANN (*joining her husband in farewell compliments*) : Aber Sicher !

[ALARIC comes from bar with drinks.

ALARIC : One for you, Herr Steiner ?

STEINER : No, thank you—I must change. (*Goes upstairs. His manner is still distrait.*)

[ALARIC and AUDREY notice it, and exchange a meaning glance. Even the FELDMANNS are a little surprised at their host's unwonted unsociability, but ALARIC distracts their attention by the drinks he is handing round.

ALARIC : Here you are, Frau Feldmann.

FRAU FELDMANN (*taking drink*) : Danke schön.

AUDREY : Dear Herr Feldmann, everything on his back but the kitchen stove. (*She regards his enormous pack with affectionate admiration.*)

FELDMANN (*taking her remark quite literally*) : What is it that you say ? Have I not got the stove ? (*To his wife*) Grete, haben wir den Kochofen vergessen ?

FRAU FELDMANN (*quickly checking the items in his pack and finding the stove is safely there*) : Nein, da ist er ja.

FELDMANN (*to AUDREY*) : It is there, the stove.

AUDREY : Oh, I didn't mean you'd forgotten it—it's just a sort of joke.

FELDMANN : A joke ?

AUDREY : I mean, because you'd so much on your back, I said you'd everything but the kitchen stove.

FELDMANN : But the stove was there.

AUDREY : Yes, but I didn't really mean anything to do with a stove. It was just a joke.

FELDMANN : But I do not see him. In England it is funny to say the stove is not there when it is ?

AUDREY (*the effort to explain is too much for her*) : No, no—I just meant that you were all ready packed—with everything. It's just an expression.

FELDMANN : Ach, I see ! It is an idiom. (*Repeating it, in order to memorise it*) When you are all packed—"Everything on but the kitchen stove." I must remember.

ALARIC : Here's your beer.

[FELDMANN takes the beer and they all drink, with various well-wishings, in English and German. While they do so, LENCHEN comes downstairs with her flower-basket. Almost unnoticed by them, she runs out of the front door.]

(*At the conclusion of the FELDMANN's "Auf Ihr Wohl, Also Gesundheit," etc.*) And in memory of our jolly concerts.

FELDMANN : We have so much enjoyed to meet you.

ALARIC : I can't think what we shall do in the evenings without you. I shall have to try to sing myself.

AUDREY : Don't be brutal, dear.

FELDMANN : Ach, that is unkind, the naughty lady. (*He laughs, and translates AUDREY's remark to his wife.*) Sie sagt, es wäre brutal, wenn er sänge.

FRAU FELDMANN (*laughing*) : Das ist eine Schande !

FELDMANN : You must learn to sing yourself, Miss Audrey.

ALARIC : I notice you don't suggest that till you're leaving.

[*They all laugh and drink again. While they are doing so, FRAU STEINER, who has changed into her everyday clothes, comes downstairs and goes into the kitchen, shutting the door behind her.*]

Come on, we've just time for a farewell song.

FELDMANN : Ach, but I cannot sing with this pack on.

ALARIC : Then take it off. We'll help you on with it. (*AUDREY helps FELDMANN to take off his pack.*)

FELDMANN : What shall it be ? I know ! " Farewell, Ladies." I sing it in English, as a compliment.

ALARIC : Good. We'll join in the chorus.

[*FELDMANN sings, the others joining in the chorus. The song is gay, but as in so many sea-shanties, there is an undercurrent of sadness. In the midst of the applause from AUDREY and ALARIC, EDITH comes downstairs. She carries her own and FANNY'S suitcases.*]

FELDMANN (*bowing gallantly*) : Ach, Miss Gunter, you are coming on the same 'bus ? That is most nice. I see you have everything on but the kitchen stove.

EDITH (*blankly*) : What ?

FELDMANN : It is an idiom. I have learnt it. Very funny. (*He laughs delightedly.*)

EDITH (*with a completely wooden face*) : Yes—quite. Where is Herr Steiner ? I want to pay the bill.

FELDMANN (*a little wounded by her lack of appreciation*) : He is upstairs. I call him——



EDITH : Oh, please don't trouble. Perhaps Frau Steiner——

ALARIC : Oh, she's no good at bills. I expect I can manage it. (*Crosses to STEINER's desk and looks through various bills, pausing to examine one with interest.*)

EDITH : Is that it ?

ALARIC : No, this is ours. I say, Audrey, you seem to have had four baths last Thursday.

AUDREY : That was the day it rained.

ALARIC : Well, I hope it doesn't rain again. That's five bob gone west.

AUDREY : One must be clean.

ALARIC : Clean ! I should think you must be sodden.—Here's yours, Miss Gunter. (*He finds EDITH's bill.*)

EDITH : Thank you.

ALARIC (*examining bill*) : Let's see, two days' full pension, two baths. Any drinks ?

EDITH : Coffee—last night.

ALARIC : Oh, but that was on Herr Steiner.

EDITH : I would prefer to pay for it.

ALARIC (*with complete comprehension*) : Ah, yes—quite. Let me see, that'll be a schilling. (*He makes the addition to the bill.*) There ! I've put it down as boot-cleaning, but it doesn't matter. And ten per cent. for tips. That makes thirty-four Austrian schillings and ten gröschen.

EDITH : Thank you. (*She offers two twenty-shilling notes.*) Have you change ?

ALARIC (*producing some from his pocket*) : There you are. Have you the copper ? (*EDITH gives him the necessary piece. He hands her six schillings change and pockets the two notes.*) Audrey, remind me Herr Steiner owes me six schillings.

AUDREY : I'll remind him you owe him thirty-four.

ALARIC : Ah, well, it's the same thing. (*To EDITH.*) Let me take your cases for you.

EDITH : Thank you, but I think I'd better go and hurry my friend.

AUDREY : Oh, I shouldn't bother—she'll be all right. You'd much better come and bag seats on the 'bus. The driver'll wait for her. Come along.

FELDMANN (*about to move towards the door*) : But we have not said good-bye to the good Herr Steiner——

AUDREY : Oh, he'll be along when the 'bus comes—he's just changing out of his Sunday best.

[ALARIC picks up EDITH's two cases, and all move towards the door. The FELDMANNs go off first, talking together in German. Just as EDITH gets to the door she stops.]

EDITH : I think I'd rather wait for Miss Gray.

AUDREY (*taking EDITH firmly by the arm*) : Have a heart, lady, have a heart.

[EDITH looks at her in blank astonishment, but, before she realises it, AUDREY, who is a strenuous young woman, has swept her off. ALARIC follows them.]

*For a moment the room is empty. Then FANNY comes downstairs, obliterated by tweeds and wearing her spectacles. She is carrying a suitcase. She pauses at foot of stairs and looks round, then drags miserably to the door. When she gets to the harp, she stops and touches it gently. While she is doing so, STEINER appears on the stairs. He has changed back into his everyday clothes.*

STEINER : Fanny ! (*She turns quickly towards him.*) You were going without saying good-bye ?

FANNY : I was trying to.

STEINER : The little brown lady again !

FANNY : Edith says you have to wear tweeds

when you're travelling. They don't fit very well.

STEINER : They do not "fit" you at all. (*He puts his hand on her shoulders and looks at her.*)

FANNY (*with a gesture towards her pince-nez*) : You see——

STEINER : But they do not change you now—it is the same Fanny.

FANNY : You'll always think of me without them, won't you ?

STEINER : I will think of you as you were this morning, wrapped in the big shawl, waiting for me. Oh, Fanny, *don't* go ! It is not yet too late—*don't* go !

FANNY : I must—you know I must——

STEINER : I do not know anything but that I love you. (*He is about to take her in his arms.*)

FANNY (*drawing away*) : No, please—please. (*She moves distractedly towards the door.*) Edith'll be waiting for me—she'll be so angry. (*Turning her head away from him, her voice little more than a whisper.*) Good-bye !

STEINER : But I cannot let you go out of my life like this ! I will come to England—I will come to see you——

FANNY : No—no !

STEINER : But you do not understand ! Not to persuade you—just as a friend—just to see you—I will wait two, three years if you wish it——

FANNY : No, I beg you not to come—for my sake !

STEINER : For your sake ?

FANNY : I shall have changed.

STEINER : Changed ?

FANNY : Oh, not my love ! But—me. I want you to remember me as I am now, not—not grown old.

STEINER (*protesting at the vision her words have conjured up*) : Fanny !

FANNY : It's all right—I shan't mind—now.

STEINER : But what will become of you ?

FANNY : I've got forty pounds a year—I told you—and I shan't need much.

STEINER : Promise me that if ever you are in need you will let me help you—promise me !

FANNY : No, I can't. I mustn't promise anything.

[*The motor horn is heard in the near distance. FANNY's pathetic attempt at composure breaks down. She looks helplessly at STEINER, and speaks in a terrified whisper.*

It's come—the 'bus !

STEINER : Not yet—it is in the village. There is still a minute.

FANNY : Edith'll be coming for me. There's—there's such a lot I want to say—and I can't think of it——

STEINER : Fanny, I cannot let you go like this—you are crying.

FANNY (*disjointedly*) : No—it's just silliness—saying good-bye. It's all right really—that's what I want you to understand—it's all right—it's *really* all right. It's just—going—that's bad. Once I get away—perhaps to Venice—but it'll be so hot there, and all those galleries. . . . It'll be better when I get back to England——

STEINER : If you change your mind in Venice, promise me you will come back——

FANNY : No, I shan't change my mind—I mustn't—— (*The noise of the engine of the 'bus is heard.*) It's here !

STEINER : It waits for a minute——

FANNY (*she is now dominated by the arrival of the*



'bus, and keeps making little ineffectual movements towards the door—only to turn back and speak with frantic haste) : I wanted to see the shrine again just once—I went out on to the balcony—but you can't see it in the daytime, can you ?

STEINER : There is a little mist——

FANNY : But it's there—it'll always be there ! Does the 'bus go past it ?

STEINER : Far below on the road—you can just see it——

FANNY : I'll watch out. (*She pauses for a second, and the noise from the 'bus seems louder and more insistent.*) I must go——

STEINER : No—no ! Let the 'bus go without you ! It is too hard—I cannot let you go !

FANNY : Oh—please—oh, I want to help you, and there's no time ! Listen—it's all right—for you, too, it would have ended. Now it's there for always—for both of us.

AUDREY (*calling from off stage*) : Miss Gray——

FANNY : Please help me to go.

[STEINER looks at her for a second and then, without a word, picks up her case and takes a step towards the door. FANNY stops him.

No—no—don't come with me, please.

STEINER : No. I will stay here. I could not bear to see the distance grow between us.

FANNY (*her voice is little more than a gasp*) : Good-bye. (*She takes the suitcase from him and goes quickly to the door. Then, once again, she turns.*) I've taken the shawl—is that all right ?

STEINER : Of course. (*Brokenly*) Lebewohl, mein Herz, mein Leben——

FANNY : Good-bye.

STEINER : *Auf wiedersehen.*

FANNY (*with a little shake of her head*) : Good-bye.

(Suddenly she pulls off her hat and her glasses and smiles at him, then rushes out.)

[For a moment STEINER is about to follow her. Then, utterly overcome, he turns and stumbles to the stove, on which he leans with his back to the door.

From outside comes a confused murmur of farewells and well-wishings, and, through all, the noise of the motor-engine. Then, mingling with these sounds and at last distinguishable from them is heard LENCHEN'S little formal song, and she enters through the bar, her basket filled with the autumn crocuses.

STEINER (turning instantly and seeing the flowers) : Bring diese schnell zu Fräulein Gray—(he hurries her to the door)—sonst ist es zu spät——

[Obediently, she runs out with her flowers to FANNY, dropping a few in her haste.

STEINER turns again to the stove and waits. Only when the final "Auf wiedersehens" have been said and the 'bus can be heard driving away, does he go to the door. LENCHEN returns, her basket empty, but he scarcely notices her. She runs into the kitchen, leaving the door open.

STEINER picks up the few fallen crocuses and carries them across to his desk, placing them in a glass of water. He then sits at the desk, staring blankly in front of him. After a few seconds he passes his hand across his forehead and looks in a dazed manner at his typewriter, on which a letter is already begun. His eyes fall on his calendar and, almost automatically he tears off yesterday's date. As he does so, the significance of his act strikes him and he crumples the paper, drawing in his breath sharply.

The clock strikes the half-hour. FRAU STEINER is heard singing in the kitchen. Deliberately, STEINER forces his hands to the keys of the typewriter.

The "high, low, high" of the motor-horn is heard in the distance.

CURTAIN

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**Author** Armour, A.S.

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